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Community involvement

In this guide, the term community involvement refers to involving the community members in choosing appropriate technology and making appropriate decisions about how infrastructure is installed, maintained and managed, using a process that also maximises skills development and employment opportunities for community members. These outcomes cannot be achieved without the involvement of the end users of the technology and infrastructure: the community.

The community will usually be involved in one or more of the following components of infrastructure development: problem identification, design, decision making, construction, management and maintenance.

When developing infrastructure in remote communities, there can be pressure to get the job done and move onto the next project, so the focus is on choosing the best technology or design for the circumstances and arranging logistics for the team doing the construction or repairs. Although this may seem the quickest and most efficient way to achieve results, there are significant risks associated with this business-as-usual approach, which can be costly in the long run. Such an approach can also be disempowering for the community.

Benefits of involving communities

This section discusses why it is important to involve the community and the benefits of doing so when developing infrastructure in Indigenous communities.

Why involve the community?

Community involvement has a number of critical functions that contribute to successful outcomes, reduced costs and reliable ongoing operation of installed equipment. For this reason, any contractor or project manager should prioritise community involvement as a form of risk management. Even small steps to involve the community can improve the reliability of technology while minimising risk of failure.

Community involvement has often been ignored or treated as a ‘side issue’ by contracted technicians, engineers or other external experts working in Indigenous communities. This mistake has led to many poorly realised infrastructure projects across remote Australia. There are many examples of how a lack of community involvement has resulted in regular failure of systems, use of technology that cannot be supported or serviced adequately, lack of understanding in the community about how to maintain and use their infrastructure, and many missed opportunities for skills building or local employment. Often, the outcomes desired by funding bodies are not achieved, money is wasted and community aspirations cannot be realised. Evidence-based reporting and evaluation are becoming common requirements from funding bodies, so accountability for the downstream impacts of infrastructure is likely to become more of a risk management issue for project managers. Many projects will also have mandatory Indigenous employment outcomes as a requirement of government funding, requiring a higher degree of community involvement.

Who benefits?

Indigenous communities, funding bodies, and contractors and managers all benefit from involvement of the community in infrastructure supply, development and maintenance.

Indigenous communities

Community involvement can achieve some important social outcomes for Indigenous communities:

- It can assist communities and their support agencies to reach greater levels of autonomy by increasing their capacity to manage their own affairs.
- It can contribute to a sense of ownership, helping communities move from being passive recipients to active participants in the design, application and management of technology and services.
- It can ensure that infrastructure development provides opportunities for effective hands-on skills development, capacity building, work experience and employment that are otherwise rare in remote regions.

Funding bodies

In order to create safe, robust and reliable infrastructure, involvement by the recipients and managers of the technologies is necessary:

- While there is a temptation for both funding bodies and contractors to pay limited attention to the community involvement process to shorten their project time schedules, projects that are effective in involving communities are more likely to achieve long-term funding outcomes.

- The more reliable and sustainable the infrastructure is, the lower the life-cycle costs are likely to be and the more cost-effective in the long term. Inappropriate technology that the community has little or no capacity to manage, maintain or repair will have excessive recurrent running costs due to the continual need to employ external contractors.

Contractors and project managers

Community involvement can have many benefits for contractors and project managers:

- Drawing on community members' knowledge and experience leads to a greater understanding of the nature of problems, technology failures and potential solutions.
- Technology is more reliable when contractors and project managers understand how communities interact with it.
- Community involvement offers the opportunity to better understand a community's capacity to respond to, manage and maintain infrastructure.
- Fewer trips may be required to repair faults or to respond to default notices in remote areas.
- Overall, community involvement can facilitate
 - better decision-making processes and outcomes, with less conflict
 - meeting procurement and funding milestones and performance indicators
 - more cost-effective life-cycle management, especially for local government
 - a much higher quality of outcomes for contractors
 - better employment and skills development outcomes for the community.

In summary, good community involvement provides:

- risk management and risk reduction
- an understanding of factors that affect timelines
- an understanding of the needs of stakeholders
- an overall understanding of needs and issues surrounding a problem
- better social outcomes and capacity building
- better value for money, for clients and funding bodies
- more sustainable, robust and reliable infrastructure
- more sustainable remote communities.

Challenges for community involvement

Community involvement needs to be integrated into a project from the outset. Understanding the types and levels of involvement, and the kinds of skills and techniques required, should be part of planning.

For community involvement to be worthwhile and effective, an appropriate process is needed. Community involvement processes may be simple and easy to implement or complex and difficult to manage, requiring specialised skills and expertise. The process could be an informal chat with a traditional owner about the events that led to the failure of a water pump, or it might involve a set of formal participatory design workshops preceded by a series of community meetings, negotiation of memoranda of understanding, and training sessions on designing and managing infrastructure into the future. It is also important when engaging with community members in remote Australia to talk to the relevant Australian, state, territory or local government office. An example would be the local FaHCSIA Indigenous Coordination Centre.

Knowing where to begin, where to end and what to look for in the middle are critical challenges for community involvement. It is best to start by gaining an overall understanding of the community and the problem or need you are addressing. The following are guidelines on what to consider when planning community involvement processes.

Cultural protocols and cross-cultural communication

Any work in an Indigenous community requires a certain level of skill in cross-cultural communication. Key references on this topic are provided at the end of this chapter. Considerations and protocols will vary across the country and will depend primarily on how traditional a community is, who you are working with and whether English is spoken widely. For example, English may be a second, third or even fourth or fifth language for many communities in central Australia, whereas English is predominantly the first language in Queensland. This means that interpreters or cultural navigators may be essential personnel in the involvement process.

Despite this diversity, some basic approaches apply when dealing with Indigenous communities.

Ensure that you:

- *are courteous and respectful* — everyone deserves a level of courtesy and respect without judgment
- *offer patience and understanding* — building trust and respect with stakeholders may take longer than you expect; it can take time for community members to understand your requests or to take ownership in your project
- *are flexible in your expectations* — your timeframes for outcomes may not be compatible with those of the community, for a variety of reasons

- *pose open questions and give people time to think* — if you are seeking information, decisions or commitments, present questions without implying a desired answer
 - if you must suggest responses, offer several to choose from
 - allow private time for stakeholders to consider their response
 - ideally set the time for a response when you pose a question for discussion
 - do not be afraid of pauses and silence in conversations
- *talk to the appropriate government managers* — these people have regular contact with the community
- *involve all community members* — men often hold key community leadership positions, but women can provide critical balance, insights and information, and must be actively involved
- *speak clearly and in plain English* — out of politeness, community members may not tell you that they are not understanding what you say
 - English may not be their first language (particularly for older people) and people may have hearing difficulties
 - for significant language barriers, use translators and interpreters and factor the costs into your project.

Consider the following points:

- *Develop a working relationship with a local person* or someone familiar with the community; they can:
 - help interpret and communicate information
 - be involved in meetings as a facilitator, assistant or observer
 - reflect on what occurred later (a lot of issues or discussion taking place may directly affect your project, but may not be immediately obvious or forthcoming).
- *Visual communication tools* can help in communication and engagement. Lengthy talks around complex or abstract concepts do not work in cross-cultural situations. Slides, video, flashcards or posters used in meetings, workshops or presentations can help to better communicate your issues. A visual communication tool can be as simple as drawing in the sand during an outdoor meeting.
- *Clearly state what you can and cannot achieve* to avoid the creation of false expectations. If you do not make clear what issues you can and cannot address, you may be expected to address issues beyond the scope of your project. Be firm, yet polite.
- *Explaining by doing* is the most effective communication. New concepts are best learned by actually carrying out a task. Wherever possible, do the task while you are explaining it.

Avoid making judgments, pressuring for information and creating expectations:

- *Making judgments* — do not be quick to make judgments about the community and its capacity for engaging with your project or the issues you present. There may be an extensive range of social, cultural, financial, historical and institutional obligations or impediments to involvement. Many community members struggle with day-to-day social and financial issues and will not be forthcoming in communicating these. In addition, Indigenous communities, like other communities, are obviously very sensitive about being judged.
- *Pressuring for information* — pressuring for an answer to a question can lead to a response including misinformation or an answer that the respondent thinks you want to hear. This occurs out of a sense of politeness or because of a desire not to offend.
- *Creating expectations* — be careful not to promise more than you are absolutely sure you can achieve. A discussion of a potential outcome may be taken as a promise to deliver, as a result of different cultural approaches to conversation or simply through misunderstanding. Many communities struggle with the range of external agencies that talk about potential projects, but for various reasons cannot deliver. From a community perspective, this can be taken as a breach of a promise, even if, in the eyes of the external service provider, they were simply exploring ideas.

Effects of community scale

A community's level of control of its infrastructure will give some clues to the community's need and desire for involvement, and the depth and type of involvement required. That is, does the community need to manage its own infrastructure and if so, what skills does it need or already have to be able to do this? This may have implications for design, repairs, upgrades, installation and maintenance; community input may be required to explore and manage these implications.

The size of a community often determines its level of participation in infrastructure and hence the approach to community involvement.

For example, an **outstation** may have no institutional arrangements in place to manage and maintain infrastructure, other than through their own prescribed body corporate or resource agency (Indigenous corporation). If the power goes out, someone needs to be able to diagnose the problem accurately, identify solutions and, if required, communicate with technical experts. As a result, residents of outstations have a greater need to understand, assess and repair infrastructure issues.

In **larger communities**, residents and householders may have less involvement in infrastructure because councils or external agencies and contractors tend to assume this responsibility. For example, state power companies (such as Ergon in Queensland, Power and Water Corporation in the Northern Territory) may manage all maintenance of power infrastructure for a large community. Water,

waste and sewerage may be managed by a local Indigenous shire council. If the power goes out or the water stops running, it is someone else's responsibility to fix it.

These issues also affect the complexity of decision making. Informed decision making that considers the local, environmental, social, human and financial contexts, and that considers not only initial capital outlays but also management and maintenance into the future, requires local involvement. The question is not just what technology to use, but how this technology can be managed and maintained into the future, and what resources the community can draw on to support this (such as access to service agencies, funds, etc).

For example, various technologies and management strategies are available to address the problem of hard water. If a high-end technology is chosen, managing and maintaining the technology into the future may be expensive and require specialist skills. In contrast, implementing management strategies (regular cleaning of filters, changing taps, etc) is a cheaper and less specialised response, which will promote local responsibility and skills development. Even in large communities, encouraging residents to manage technology at a household level can increase the life cycle of hardware and reduce the cost of bringing in external contractors.

Risks and limitations

Developing infrastructure in Indigenous communities involves risks, but the process can be highly rewarding. The risks can be managed by taking into account your own limitations and the limitations of the community.

Lack of community involvement

The community must be involved on any infrastructure project. If the community is not involved, the project is less likely to have a successful outcome. There may be unforeseen reactions to the infrastructure or the development may be inappropriate. Remember that stakeholders who live outside the community may need to be consulted; for example, a traditional owner might live in Darwin, but still speak for a remote community.

Lack of capacity to deliver

You must have the capacity to follow through and deliver on the outcomes of the involvement process. Have a clear scope of work and a good understanding of your expectations of the involvement process. Consult carefully with all stakeholders so they understand their and others' responsibilities in carrying out the work. If training is required, make sure those who need to deliver it can and will do so.

Consultation fatigue

Consultation fatigue results when there is too much talking and not enough action. Too much community involvement without concrete outcomes can mean that stakeholders lose interest. The community may already be involved in lots of different meetings and consultation processes — understandably, a poorly executed consultation will not achieve community involvement and will reduce the effectiveness of future consultations.

Lack of skills in cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural communication can be tricky, and it is easy for misunderstandings to arise. If you are unsure how best to involve a community, consult an organisation or individual with experience in community involvement; this could be officers from the relevant government authority who may already have good working relationships with the community. If you can work alongside another organisation to manage your involvement with the community, your task will be easier.

Lack of cultural awareness

Non-Indigenous people may not be aware of Indigenous cultural protocols that vary among communities. Understandably, communities will see cultural obligations as more important than your infrastructure project. Get advice from a local, and be aware of cultural obligations, protocols and communication as these will have an impact on any works that depend on assistance from the community.

Limited time and money

Few projects plan for or allocate enough financial resources for community involvement. Including a budgeted and scheduled community involvement phase in a project will ensure that you do not run out of time or money. This phase will be money well spent, because it will reduce the risks associated with getting the project completed on time to the satisfaction of the community and client. Well-executed community involvement will also significantly increase the chance of the technology being sustainable and reliably operated over its entire life cycle. Remember, community involvement can be lengthy and unpredictable, or simple and quick, so allow for a degree of flexibility in project planning.

Recognising community involvement

It is too often assumed that community members will volunteer their time for the good of the community. There are a number of ways that participation in consultation can be recognised, and asking someone with experience, such as the resource agency or an Indigenous organisation, is the best option if you are unsure what is appropriate. Acknowledging community member's contribution, such as putting on a barbecue for the community or providing references, can go a long way to shoring up participation.

Limited transportation and mobility

Do not assume that community members are able to travel to any location for any meeting. It may be a huge challenge for people to travel to meetings at their own expense. It is always better to meet people on their own territory or to assist with travel expenses.

Transient workforce

People in key positions in remote communities may move on with little or no warning. Many communities find it difficult to provide staff for key positions, and often jobs are filled by outsiders. Staff turnover may occur every few years or even months. Do not rely on only one or two people for the success of a project.

Steps for community involvement

This section sets out what you need to know about yourself, the community and the infrastructure work so that you can plan and manage effective and appropriate community involvement. Take the following basic steps to involve the community:

- understand the community
- determine what you and the community need
- identify the type of involvement required
- assess whether you need help
- identify the stakeholders
- seek agreement.

Understand the community

Ensure that:

- you collate a general picture of how the community operates, who to talk to and who you are going to work with, before starting your project.

Factors that influence how to work with the community are:

- governance arrangements (what organisations control different aspects of the infrastructure in the community)
- land tenure
- essential service delivery arrangements
- housing arrangements
- environmental and economic issues
- culture and language.

Consider:

- exploring the history of service delivery in a community, and gaining an understanding of planned future activities or infrastructure-related projects
- gaining technical information from community members; do not assume that they lack relevant knowledge
- accessing any (complex) networks of service providers who have an ongoing relationship with the community, such as
 - regular contractors who are familiar with the workings of the community and may have valuable information
 - health service providers with an interest in your infrastructure from a health perspective
- that arrangements can be complicated and will differ widely from location to location, and may also change regularly and without much notice; for example
 - staff members may leave and not be replaced easily
 - government policy may shift, which can have a profound impact on the community
 - desktop research may provide information that rapidly becomes outdated; recent information from people on the ground can be more reliable
- talking to residents, local government, the Indigenous community council, regional land council or a government Indigenous Coordination Centre may be a good start in getting a picture of the community.

In factoring community involvement into your planning, consider the following questions:

- What investments (financial and human resources) need to be secured by all parties to facilitate involvement? Negotiate these upfront.
- What is the history of the community's involvement with their infrastructure? (For example, are community members accustomed to being involved in any aspects of the design, installation or running of their infrastructure?) And how does this relate to their desire to be involved? Talk to the appropriate agencies as outlined above.
- What skills, assets and capacity to be involved does the community have?
- What support networks are available to help facilitate community involvement?
- What funds are available in your project to allow time and resources for community involvement?

Determine what you and the community need

The objective of community involvement is likely to be one that assists in helping you get the job done in an effective and timely manner. The aim of the project should be reliable and sustainable infrastructure that works well for the residents while improving quality of life and amenity. Community involvement will help ensure this is the case.

If the task is quite simple, like repairing a malfunctioning bore pump, then the community involvement outcome may be quite limited and straightforward. For example, if the pump repeatedly breaks down you may need community members to help get a greater understanding of the problem rather than just returning to the community to fix the same problem again and again.

If you are investigating a more complex issue, such as upgrading a water supply or addressing waste management issues, the expected outcome may require a more complex level of involvement that explores user or demand-side management issues.

In identifying the objective(s) of community involvement in a project, consider the following questions:

- Do the stakeholders need simply to be aware of what you are doing or are you looking for a greater level of involvement?
- How much does the community need to be able to know and do, to sustain the infrastructure?
- Do you need certain community members or stakeholders to help you find out why an infrastructure fault or problem exists?
- Do you need input from community stakeholders in order to make critical technical design decisions?
- Do you need community stakeholders to make critical decisions on your behalf?
- Do you need community stakeholders to take responsibility for the ongoing management of the infrastructure?
- What resources do community members have to draw on for installation, management and maintenance?
- What funds, either from user-pays regimes or grant funding, are available or can be generated over time in order to ensure ongoing maintenance of infrastructure?
- What change needs to occur (in terms of who takes responsibility for what or in demand-side management) to ensure reliability and sustainability?

Example outcomes of community involvement:

- Community council understands the problem with their infrastructure, the limitations of the technology and the way it will be repaired.
- General community is informed about the progress of the development of their infrastructure and the discussions taking place.
- General community understands the demand-side management issues and how to live with the limitations of the technology.
- Community members or stakeholders help you understand a problem or system failure and how it came about.
- Community and stakeholders provide feedback on issues of design, location and maintenance of the infrastructure.
- Community and stakeholders identify infrastructure needs, and problems (potential or existing).
- Agreements are negotiated as to the responsibilities of each stakeholder — from users (community residents) to resource agency (such as community council) to service providers (for example, power and water company).

Identify the type of involvement required

The spectrum of community involvement ranges from information sharing to full and active participation. Identifying the type of involvement desired will help you to identify what tools and skills will be required. The following section outlines the types and techniques of community involvement that might be employed, and provides examples of the social and technical outcomes and benefits.

Information sharing with the community

Information sharing keeps the community and its stakeholders informed about existing and potential infrastructure problems and ongoing infrastructure projects and activities (such as maintenance and management). As a result, community ownership of, participation in and satisfaction with infrastructure increases (see Table A1.1).

Techniques:

- easy-to-understand infrastructure guides or manuals, newsletters, posters about energy use or waste management, community meetings, trouble-shooting guides.

Table A1.1: Information sharing

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcomes	Benefits
Community experiences flooding from sewerage overflow. The community is kept informed about what is happening to address the situation, and discussion is promoted about possible causes and ways to prevent the flooding from recurring.	Posters, leaflets, community meetings	Community contributes to understanding of how the problem occurs, identifying the behaviours and practices that are leading to blockages. Community understands more about their infrastructure, its limitations and how it will be repaired.	Community takes some ownership of the situation. Community polices practices contributing to blockages.

Consultation with the community

Consultation is used in identifying problems and designing solutions; it involves information gathering with input and feedback from the community to assist in decision making (see Table A1.2).

Techniques:

- community meetings, transect walks (such as walking through the community with residents or managers to get a picture of water supply), interviews and questionnaires.

Table A1.2: Consultation

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcome	Benefits
New ultraviolet water-treatment systems fail. Community is consulted to find out why.	Community meetings, one-on-one conversations, meetings with appropriate people	Community did not understand the need to keep pumps running and the need to avoid dry run. Solution: dry run protection valves installed	Potential unforeseen problems and pitfalls are unearthed and further failures are avoided.
Community composting toilets are being contaminated regularly. Community is consulted to appraise the problem and identify solutions.	Posters, community meetings where the community discusses when and how the problems occurred	Community suggests visitors contaminated systems with rubbish and antibacterial cleaning agents because of lack of knowledge about use of the systems. Solution: new pictorial signage is developed with community to install in toilets	Community is more aware of how to manage composting toilet systems and takes some responsibility for informing visitors. Signage is developed with assistance from the community. Costs of bringing in contractors to pump out toilets are reduced, and environmental health conditions improve.

Informed decision making by the community

Using informed decision making, key community members or stakeholders are provided with information and then make decisions about their preferred infrastructure technology (see Table A1.3).

Techniques:

- community/stakeholders control decision making or design with input from experts to inform choices and explain limitations (for example, technical advice might be given to a local steering committee about technology options, the steering committee then makes decisions about how to proceed)
- training and capacity building, participatory design workshops, community-facilitated meetings, technical advice discussion papers.

Table A1.3: Informed decision making

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcome	Benefits
Reducing water wastage: community identifies problems and their solutions through a process of research and discussion.	Photovoice (see Useful terms), participatory research (eg community researches problems themselves).	Community takes photos of where water is being wasted and, in a facilitated workshop, decides how to reduce wastage.	Community is educated in waste/ conservation issues through process while taking ownership of solutions. Community members are more likely to change behaviours.

Negotiation

In negotiation, the community and its stakeholders identify the infrastructure needs and potential or existing problems. All stakeholders then work together on a level playing field to decide how to address an issue (see Table A1.4).

Techniques:

- collaborative and inclusive decision making, design or information gathering
- stakeholder meetings, workshops, participatory research, mind mapping, negotiation roundtables, photovoice and other creative tools
- negotiated service agreements, memoranda of understanding (MOU).

Table A1.4: Negotiation

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcome	Benefits
Appraising waste management options: community works with project team to identify problems and solutions.	Community transect walk; time is allowed for those involved to think about and discuss issues; community meeting later explores the issues and potential solutions	Community members police litter problems.	Community takes greater role in managing waste and litter issues. Sense of pride is established in keeping the community clean.
Choosing a new wastewater treatment facility: a working committee is established to provide feedback on possible design and siting.	Community meetings and facilitated workshops leading to creation of working committee	Working committee liaises with project team to negotiate key siting of facility.	Siting of infrastructure does not clash with future plans for land and is not sited on culturally significant sites.

Ongoing participation

Ongoing participation means that key community stakeholders are trained to manage aspects of the ongoing maintenance of the infrastructure; the community is involved in maintenance and management according to its capacity (see Table A1.5).

Techniques:

- training, mentoring, regular newsletters, negotiated service agreements and division of responsibilities.

Table A1.5: Ongoing participation

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcome	Benefits
Energy planning: decision making about energy issues and demand-side management. Training is provided to build capacity for ongoing trouble-shooting and maintenance of the energy supply.	Community meetings, one-on-one conversations and meetings, facilitated energy planning workshops, training and skills development and negotiated service agreements	The community assists in calculating an energy budget for each household; this allows a new generator of appropriate size to be purchased. The community is trained in generator operations and maintenance and has capacity to identify and organise major repairs.	New infrastructure addresses the actual need and serves the community. New generator is appropriately sized for needs, reducing diesel costs. Reliability of supply is increased through reduced outage times.

Employment, skills development, education and training

Identifying opportunities for employment, skills development, education and training for community members is an important way to involve the community. If this is done well, community members are involved in construction and ongoing management and maintenance of infrastructure, and community members' skills and trades are used in installation or repair of infrastructure (see Table A1.6).

Techniques:

- community labour, accredited training, apprenticeships, mentoring, informal non-accredited training.

Table A1.6: Employment, skills development, education and training

Example of community involvement	Techniques	Outcome	Benefits
Local airstrip needs upgrading: training is provided to community workers to facilitate construction and ongoing maintenance.	Community labour, accredited training, apprenticeships, mentoring, informal non-accredited training	Community workers are trained in plant operations, and acquire appropriate licenses before and during construction. Machinery is hired from nearby Indigenous shire council. Local job network facilitates training and certificates for fencing gang working on perimeter of aerodrome.	Cost of airstrip upgrade and future maintenance costs are significantly reduced, as is the need to fly in external plant operators and contractors. The community has capacity to maintain airstrip surface and fencing. Community workers are employed in fencing on nearby cattle station. Plant operators have better employment opportunities within the mining sector.

Assess whether you need help

If you are unsure about leading community involvement processes, it may be worth considering contracting a third party with experience in community involvement techniques and perhaps an established working relationship with the community.

When deciding whether you, your company or your organisation have the right skills to manage community involvement, consider:

- whether you understand cultural protocols and customs
- whether your skills and your relationship with the community are sufficient to undertake this level of community involvement
- how well you understand the community you are working with
- what aspects you need help with.

Identify the stakeholders

Generally the more complex a desired outcome, the more time you need to spend working out who you need to talk to or who to involve. Usually a few meetings and phone calls with community members will help you understand which key players are relevant. If you are unfamiliar with the community, it may take time to get a complete picture of all the players involved with its infrastructure.

Be careful not to limit your discussions to one or two key people. It is a common mistake to approach the person who speaks the loudest or who is the easiest to engage with, but they may not necessarily be the most appropriate person. Spend more time and talk to more people, allowing time for others to come forward.

Consider the following questions:

- Who needs to be involved, when and about what? (Relevant questions include: Who owns the infrastructure, who uses it, is land tenure an issue, who are the traditional owners of that area?)
- Who can help you identify the relevant stakeholders? Talk to agencies, organisations and government bodies such as the regional Indigenous Coordination Centre to get a picture, ask members of your existing stakeholder list for suggestions and always get a local Indigenous perspective.
- What community issues and political landscapes will be important to consider when selecting participants?
- What service delivery arrangements are already in place that may be relevant?
- If there are external service providers for infrastructure, do you need to involve them as stakeholders?

Example stakeholders in remote Indigenous communities

- Traditional owners
- Community leaders
- Land councils who may need to be involved
- Native title representative bodies (NTRBs)
- Other organisations who have had an involvement in that infrastructure issue in the past
- Local employment program providers who may wish to be involved
- Community or shire council (councillors, chief executive officers, technical services managers)
- Resource agency (an organisation that supplies a range of services such as health services or housing to a group of outstations)
- Health service providers who may be affected
- Non-profit or non-government organisations (NGOs) working with the community (for example, Oxfam, World Vision)
- Community businesses or enterprises (such as ecotourism ventures, market gardens, community store)
- Government agencies who need to be kept informed (such as the Indigenous Coordination Centre or other administrators)
- Government agencies with a special interest in that infrastructure system
- Householders, community residents, visitors
- Other internal community groups (for example, women's shelter, arts groups, youth organisations, justice groups, schools, church groups)
- Users of the infrastructure — community residents

Seek agreement

The aim of establishing an agreement is to avoid conflict arising from misunderstanding or confusion about the objectives of a project. An agreement can help establish the roles and expectations of each stakeholder involved. It may be a formal contract but is more commonly a simple memorandum of understanding or 'MOU'. An MOU is a short document in plain English that identifies what each party is expected to do or provide in their involvement (for example, in relation to governance, funding, operational/working relationship, management and maintenance). All parties sign to show that they agree to the MOU.

Consider:

- making a formal agreement when using more complex forms of community involvement
- the importance of being clear about what can and cannot realistically be done, to avoid later misunderstandings
- how an agreement can be useful in laying the ground rules for communication and decision making.

Example content of an MOU

- A contractor agrees to complete works to industry standard while providing training in maintenance and management procedures.
- An Indigenous community council agrees to provide labour to assist with installation and staff to be trained in ongoing maintenance and management.
- A local Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution provides assessment and accreditations for skills learned during the project.
- A project manager agrees to facilitate all meetings while acting as the key contact for any issues arising.
- Key community contacts and processes for liaison and communication are identified (for example, the members of a working group are identified, with a key person to act as a community liaison).
- Processes for involvement are outlined — for example, regular monthly meetings.

Community involvement in practice

There are several interrelated elements involved in community infrastructure projects:

- appraising requirements
- choosing appropriate solutions
- installing infrastructure
- managing and maintaining infrastructure.

A more detailed look at what community involvement might be like in each of these phases follows.

Please note that the information provided is necessarily generic and may not always be relevant to your case. More specific questions and advice can be found in the community involvement sections of each chapter.

Appraising requirements

At the appraisal stage you are getting to know the community and its needs, whether this is to design new infrastructure or to investigate how a problem or issue arose.

Involving the community in this context will most commonly be a consultative process. In rare cases where the issue is relatively complicated, you may consider more complex forms of community involvement.

Ensure that:

- an appropriate range of people is consulted or involved in meetings or other processes
- any committees are truly representative and involve all appropriate stakeholders (including external organisations)
- you understand the history of service provision surrounding your infrastructure issue — particularly if there have been misunderstandings between stakeholders in the past
- meetings are timed not to clash with cultural obligations or other important business.

Consider:

- using the appraisal stage to build the community's capacity to understand how to better manage their infrastructure (for example, community members are assisted to research their waste problem and to identify their own solutions for better waste management).

Avoid:

- relying on one or two people for your information — often the people who are easiest to engage with will not have all your answers
- assuming that one or two people speak for the community as a whole
- speaking only to men; the women of a community will have critical insights into how problems may arise.

Choosing appropriate solutions

For some projects, you may be designing new or replacement infrastructure or improving or expanding existing infrastructure. At this stage, when you are designing and choosing solutions, you should also identify how failed components will be repaired.

There are various ways to involve the community at this stage. These range from simply keeping the community informed about decision-making processes, to having key stakeholders within the community provide feedback on design options, through to a more direct involvement in the design process or control over final decisions.

Ensure that:

- the community is informed and kept aware of decisions being made
- appropriate stakeholders have opportunity to provide feedback
- siting of infrastructure has been cleared with relevant stakeholders (including traditional owners, local council, residents)
- service arrangements are identified with the community and are workable.

Consider:

- using the design process as an opportunity to identify residents' existing skills and knowledge and what they are doing already to manage and maintain their infrastructure
- involving the relevant community members in the design process so that you design a system that the community can be involved in building
- using the design process as an opportunity to train relevant community members in maintenance requirements, and to design infrastructure that the community has the capacity to maintain themselves
- involving the relevant community members in the design process in order to maximise local involvement in ongoing maintenance, so that the community has the skills and desire to maintain the infrastructure with minimum outside assistance
- using community involvement specialists or facilitators to assist with more complex forms of involvement in a 'participatory design' process.

Avoid:

- designing infrastructure technology without identifying how it can be maintained in the long term.

Installing infrastructure

Installing or upgrading infrastructure can be disruptive to the community, and often communities are not involved in the installation process. Skilled contractors are often brought in on a short contract to build or repair infrastructure. In most cases, there are opportunities for community involvement in the installation process that can provide a range of benefits. More and more tenders are calling for local employment and training as a condition of the contract being awarded. These outcomes will become a core condition of the majority of contracts in the future.

In order to maximise community employment and skills development, you will need to work closely with local training and employment providers, understand their current work-ready support mechanisms and their capacity to be involved. A greater degree of community consultation over an allocated period of time will be required.

Ensure that:

- possible opportunities for community employment and skills development are maximised
- the community knows who will be where and when, and what work is taking place
- community members are informed of opportunities for employment and skills development and have the opportunity to choose to be involved
- local job placement providers are consulted — they will often see your project as an opportunity that is worth investing in
- external contractors are aware of cultural protocols and sensitivities, especially community alcohol restrictions
- timing of any works is appropriate for the community (ceremony, sorry business, etc) and has the flexibility to deal with unexpected cultural obligations.

Consider:

- engaging a community works team to assist in installation — if appropriate
- using the installation process as an opportunity to train and mentor relevant community members for ongoing maintenance and management
- assessing whether there are training opportunities to assist members' participation in infrastructure installation — registered training organisations working within the community should be involved as stakeholders to allow them to identify opportunities
- how to remove barriers to involvement (for example, if the project is in a remote location, assistance with travel and provision of food for workers may be required).

Avoid:

- ignoring opportunities for direct involvement or skills development in installation and construction of infrastructure
- consultations that do not allow enough time for community stakeholders or members to come forward with their desire for involvement.

Managing and maintaining infrastructure

The choice of technology is critical to ensuring the community has or can develop the capacity to manage and maintain their infrastructure. If the technology chosen is culturally, socially, environmentally and economically appropriate, it will open the door for community involvement in operations and maintenance, which is important for ensuring infrastructure is safe, robust, reliable, and ultimately sustainable into the future.

The level of community responsibility for infrastructure management will depend on the size of the community and its essential service delivery arrangements. In some cases, the community will not need to be directly involved in management (for example, a state utility may manage power or water). In other cases, such as small communities and outstations, the community may have significant responsibility for all infrastructure. Obviously, a community that has more control over its infrastructure maintenance will require a higher level of involvement.

Ensure that:

- you maximise the opportunities for local control of operations and maintenance where possible
- you understand operations and maintenance arrangements, and the responsibilities of different organisations
- you have a picture of the history of management and maintenance issues as well as what has not worked in the past
- you draw on lessons of past failures or successes
- you have a picture of the community's existing capabilities and networks for accessing skills and service support before identifying pathways for involvement in operation and maintenance.

Consider:

- devolving responsibility to the community for decision making about how best to manage and maintain infrastructure elements
- working with registered training providers and job placement enterprises to identify training and employment opportunities and support mechanisms
- developing a program to transfer skills for operations and maintenance to the community over time if required skills are not already available in the community
- drafting a 'division of responsibilities' agreement and schedule that identifies maintenance tasks to be carried out by each party (including residents' maintenance tasks, community resource agency tasks and external contractor maintenance tasks).

Avoid:

- relying entirely on external skills and contractors for all aspects of operations and maintenance – this is ultimately unsustainable both technically and financially.

Useful terms

Community involvement	Community involvement or engagement is the participation of community members in an activity or project at some level. Depending on a range of factors, this participation may be limited (eg to consultation or decision making), or it may extend to an active role in the installation, management, and ongoing operation and maintenance of infrastructure.
Consultation	A dialogue in which knowledge, advice and understanding is shared between two parties, taking into account the interests and feelings of both.
Demand-side management	<p>Actions that influence the pattern of use of a commodity, such as water or energy, by the end users. Demand-side management is usually intended to make supply and/or consumption more cost-efficient and resource-efficient. It may involve either technology, such as smart meters and energy-efficient devices or processes such as awareness campaigns to advise or train users in appropriate use.</p> <p>This is in contrast to supply-side management, the traditional approach to making the supply of a commodity cost-efficient and resource-efficient, through measures such as user-pays pricing, design of the delivery infrastructure, and load-shedding.</p>
Indigenous Coordination Centre	Regional office of the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Infrastructure	The fixed physical assets used to deliver a service to a community or region.
Life cycle	In relation to infrastructure, the time cycle from procurement and implementation of infrastructure through to its eventual disposal and replacement.
Life-cycle cost	The full cost of the infrastructure over its life cycle, including design, procurement (capital cost), installation, operation, maintenance and disposal costs.
Mind mapping	A visual method of generating ideas (brainstorming) through starting with a central idea and branching out from there through associated thoughts.
MOU	memoranda of understanding
Outstation	A smaller community where one or a few families reside.

(Outstation) resource agency	An organisation that supplies a range of services to a group of outstations.
Photovoice	A participatory method of community consultation that assists people to give insight into how they view their circumstances. They are asked to represent their community or point of view by taking and presenting photographs.
Risk management	The process of identifying the risks or threats to the success of a project or the ongoing operation of an infrastructure service, and implementing responses that are proportionate to the threats.
Stakeholders	People or groups with an interest in the outcome of a project.
Transect walk	A consultative method of information gathering, where the inquirer and community member(s) walk along a given path through the community (transect) to observe and record the location and distribution of resources, features and land uses.

Further reading

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