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RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

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A POCKET GUIDE TO
**ENGAGEMENT
DESIGN**

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When we think of engagement in the design process most of us want to know the “right way” to do it in order to have a specific impact on a project, but engagement isn’t one-size fits all. Engaging stakeholders in a design process is more about what tools are right for that project in the context of that community at that time.

Think of it as bringing soup to your sick neighbor. There is much more to helping your neighbor get well than bringing the soup itself. In order for the soup to have an impact, you must know a little about your neighbor to begin with. First of all, you must know him well enough to know they are sick. You also must know him well enough to know what kind of soup he likes, or if he likes soup at all. There also has to be a level of trust between you two for him to even feel comfortable accepting and eating the soup.

Whether you are talking about a sick neighbor or an engagement process, it is clear that the impact of your actions are dependent on established relationships and the context of the situation at hand.





CATALOGUE & MAP STAKEHOLDERS

IDENTIFY THE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

DETERMINE METHODS & DESIGN A STRATEGY

Rather than applying a generic process to every project, it may be more useful to approach engagement as an ongoing design process in itself that responds to your project, community, and relationships as they develop.

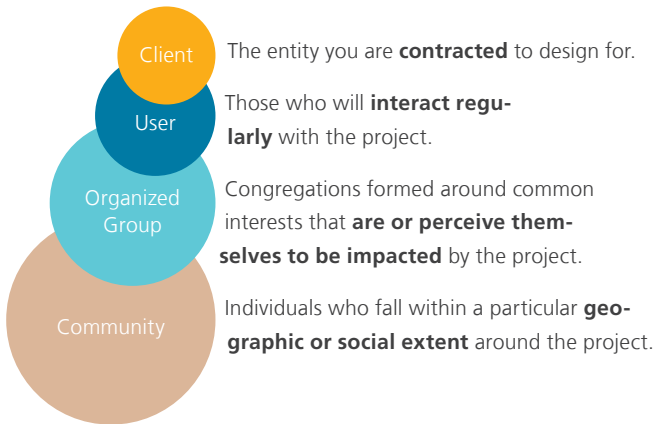
This quick guide walks you through one way of designing an engagement process including how to determine the potential impact of your project, the type of input that your engagement should elicit, and how to make a plan for the implementation of your engagement process. Worksheets are also provided for mapping your stakeholders' influence, identifying an engagement target, and planning a strategy to implement an engagement process.

For more information on individual engagement methods please refer to the *Engagement Method Card Deck*.

CATALOGUE & MAP STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that **are affected by or can affect** activities associated with the project and its long-term performance. Though the process of engaging stakeholders varies depending on the type of project and its context, the common goal is to draw out deeper perspectives and voices from those who have an economic, environmental, or social stake in the project’s outcomes.

Some stakeholders you may encounter are:



Stakeholders may have different relationships to one another, which may impact how you interact with them. **Diagramming how different stakeholders are related** may be helpful in designing your engagement strategy.

A few examples of stakeholder diagrams include:



Nested

Parts represent the interest of the whole and communication is fluid across scales.



Bubble

Existing channels of communication allow for overlap of some groups.



Siloed

Unclear channels of communication or overlapping motives separate groups.

When considering your stakeholders, it will be helpful to **identify how their goals for the project may or may not align** with yours or the client's. It is also important to **consider how much influence** those stakeholders have in the decision-making process.

The *Map of Influence* worksheet on the following page provides a helpful **framework for identifying the project goals** and competing goals that may be held by stakeholders and their **level of influence on the project**.

This map of stakeholders should be treated as a **living document**. You may find that some stakeholders become more aligned with certain goals or experience a change in influence throughout the project. You may also use this as a tool for identifying stakeholders with low influence at the moment, but are aligned with the project goals. Strategically increasing their influence in the process may help you meet the project's goals and encourage others with higher influence to follow.

MAP OF INFLUENCE

	Project Goals What is the current project agenda?	Competing Goals What are the conflicting agendas?	
			Aligned
			Undecided
			Aligned

DECISIVE POWER

They are key decision makers in the process.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANT

They should or strongly perceive they should play a role.

TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

They could provide valuable information, but aren't the focus.

NOT ON THE RADAR

Not impacted by or do not claim a stake in the project.

High Input

Low Input



IDENTIFY THE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

There are multiple levels of engagement identified by practitioners and researchers, which are categorized by the **engagement intentions** and the **relationships built** between stakeholders and decision-makers. The four levels identified in this guide provide for a range of relational and transactional relationships to suit your engagement goals. This range is examined below .

Relational

4. Collaborate

A partnership is formed with stakeholders to share in the decision-making process including development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

Process



3. Involve

Stakeholders are involved throughout most of the process to ensure their interests are consistently understood and considered.



2. Consult

The stakeholders provide input at pre-designated points in the process which may or may not influence the project.



1. Inform

Stakeholders know about a project that might impact them, but have minimal influence on the decision-making process.



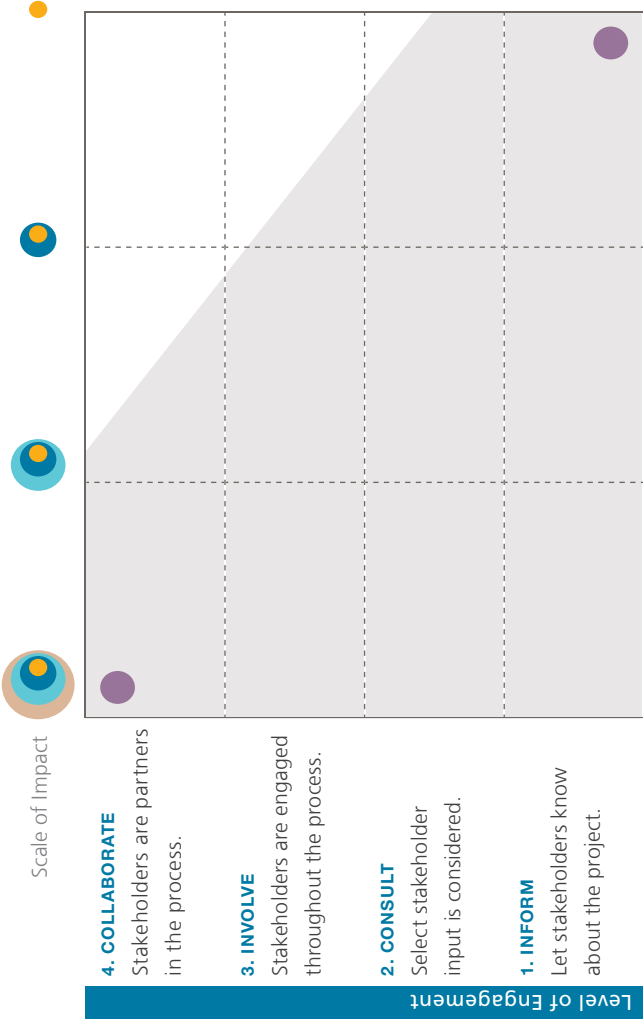
Transactional

ENGAGEMENT TARGET

The *Engagement Target* worksheet on the opposite page will help you to identify a target for your engagement strategy based on the level of engagement you hope to achieve and the scale of impact your project may have. Setting **goals for what level of engagement is appropriate** for your type of project and the stakeholders involved will help the design team select methods and design a strategy to involve stakeholders in a meaningful engagement process.

Typically, projects that have a large potential impact on a range of stakeholder groups including community members, organized groups, users, and the client will require a higher level of engagement than those that have a smaller scale of impact. The purple dots in the top and bottom corners of the worksheet represent the two extremes of impact and engagement possibilities. Most projects fall somewhere in the grey zone of the worksheet depending on the social and political context of the proposed development.

ENGAGEMENT TARGET WORKSHEET





DETERMINE METHODS & DESIGN A STRATEGY

Designing your engagement process and the methods you will use is just as important as designing the building itself. Each method must be **curated to the type of stakeholders you are engaging and the information you are seeking**. Below are a few tips that will help you design and implement an engagement process.

BE ITERATIVE

Methods should build on each other to move the conversation forward. Use multiple methods to share and learn information.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Never assume information is common knowledge. Be sure everybody involved understands the issues at stake.

ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

Specify what elements are up for discussion and where input from stakeholders can have an impact.

BUILD CAPACITY

Identify where capacity to engage is low and respond appropriately to those needs.

IDENTIFY RISKS

Identify the potential for conflict as fully as possible and prepare to facilitate resolution through engagement.

PROVIDE ENOUGH TIME

Understanding new information and building trust takes time. Be prepared to improvise if needed.

Several manuals for engagement have been produced to guide designers of all kinds through the process of **making it possible for people to be involved in shaping their environment**. The engagement methods described briefly in this pocket guide have been selected because they are some of the **more common and easy to use methods** available to design practitioners. These methods are explored further in the *Engagement Method Card Deck* and in the publications in the “Additional Resources” section at the end of this guide.

There is certainly no shortage of methods and tools available to design practitioners looking to get stakeholders involved in their projects. The barrier to incorporating meaningful engagement into projects is more often the **time available to plan and facilitate the process itself**. For this reason designers tend to stick to a limited reserve of methods that they find safe and reliable and only use them in instances where they can control all of the variables.

Reality is often messy and unpredictable when you combine a traditional design process with the social and political context of development. Taking time to **select engagement methods early in the project** will provide the design team more **opportunities to involve stakeholders in the design process in more meaningful ways**. Once your team has an idea of what methods they would like to use, you should move on to the *Strategy Planner* worksheet (pg. 19) and make a schedule for when to use those methods in your design process.

INFORMATION GATHERING METHODS

Some methods are particularly useful for gathering and sharing information. Below are a few methods to engage stakeholders in answering specific questions or conceptualizing project ideas.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP



A highly interactive meeting focused on completing a specific task related to design priorities. They are especially useful for complex design issues and allow a high level of engagement.

PUBLIC MEETING



A large public comment meeting where participants make comments to the entire audience. Everyone gets to hear what is said, but some people tend to dominate rather than discuss an issue.

SURVEY



Collect self-reported information about individual characteristics, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, or attitudes. Efficient for collecting large amounts of data quickly.

FOCUS GROUPS



Provides a broad view of how a small group of stakeholders see an issue or use a space. Focus groups allow you to hear everyone's voice and provide insight into themes, patterns, and trends.

SHADOWING



An observational method of tracking someone in his or her role to experience the situations they encounter in daily life. Enables the collection of insights through firsthand, real-time exposure.

PROJECT FLASHCARDS



Small groups are provided cards with best practices for the project type or for a specific topic. Groups prioritize ideas that they think are applicable to the project and discuss why.

OUTREACH METHODS

Some methods are designed to experiment with project concepts or build support for a project. Below are a few methods that enable the design team to reach new stakeholders and test their design ideas.

PROTOTYPING



A physical translation of stakeholder input that can be used to further review and refine proposed concepts. Creating tangible artifacts enables stakeholders to participate in idea testing.

POP-UP STALL



Interactive displays that bring your questions to the street to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Pop-up stalls can activate a space and engage those who you may not otherwise reach.

ONLINE PLATFORM



A convenient venue for communication. Visitors are able to access project information, leave comments, and participate in surveys or interactive mapping through a project website.

OPEN HOUSE



An event to showcase project partners, share information, and/or celebrate project milestones. This is an opportunity to foster new lines of communication with stakeholders and build trust.

COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS



Community members are trained and empowered to deliver project information. They can also collect information from stakeholders outside of formal events.

COMPLIMENTARY PROGRAMMING



Coordinate with community programs that are related to the project. This strategy can help build allies and support benefits of the project to the larger community.

SYNTHESIS METHODS

The ability to synthesis information collected through engagement is just as important as gathering it in the first place. Below are methods for translating data into findings that may impact a project's design.

PERSONAS



Used to consolidate descriptions of behavior patterns into representative profiles to humanize the design focus, test scenarios, and aid design communication. A unique aspect of this method is that you do not look at the entire person, but use an area of focus as a lens to highlight the relevant attitudes within a specific context.

KJ METHOD



Works towards group consensus in an innovative meeting format. The method asks all participants to be active in their engagement of the issue, and to record down any thoughts, concerns, questions, or appreciations they might have on any issue. Viewing written comments together allows for insightful patterns to emerge from the participants.

AEIOU



An organizational framework for guiding and coding observations according to a taxonomy of activities, environments, interactions, objects, and users. This helps the researcher attend to key details when using ethnographic or observation research techniques.

ELITO METHOD

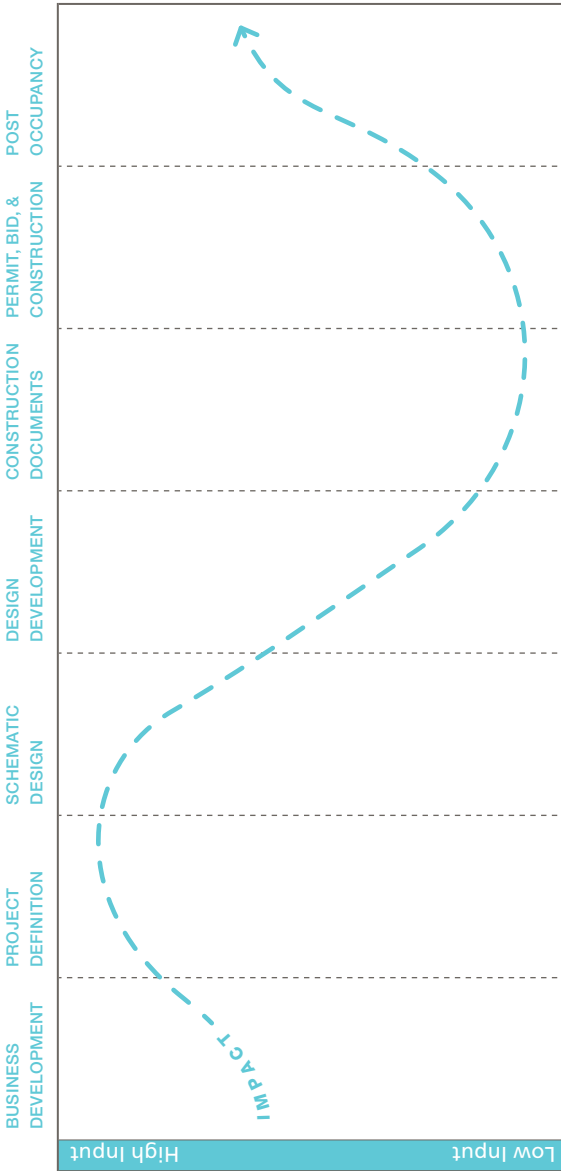


A method to capture design research observations and rapidly bridge those observations into core concepts to facilitate a direction amongst design teams. Brings together multidisciplinary teams shortly after research has been conducted to externalize observations into logical design arguments.

The *Strategy Planner* worksheet on the next page provides a simple way to plan your engagement strategy and may help **ameliorate some of the unpredictability in the engagement process**. Typically, the most helpful input comes earlier on in the design process, such as the phases we usually think of as project definition and schematic design. To use the planner, the design team should identify when the input gathered from their target stakeholders in their chosen engagement methods would have the most potential impact on the project. As additional methods are placed along the schedule your engagement plan will start to reveal itself.

Identifying methods that will **help stakeholders provide the input the design team needs** and implementing them **early on in the design process** will result in the most positive impact on a project. In projects where engagement is not planned, stakeholders are usually involved in an ad hoc fashion at later stages in the design process where their input has little impact on the project. This does little to satisfy the stakeholder's desires for transparency or the design team's desires for public support for the project.

STRATEGY PLANNER WORKSHEET





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Creighton, J. (2005). *The public participation handbook: Making better decisions through citizen involvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Jones, P., Petrescu, D., & Till, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Architecture and participation*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Kaner, S., & Lind, L. (2014). *Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lerner, J. (2014). *Making democracy fun: How game design can empower citizens and transform politics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Martin, B., & Hanington, B. (2012). *Universal Methods of Design: 100 ways to research complex problems, develop innovative ideas, and design effective solutions*. Beverly: Rockport.

Sanoff, H. (2000). *Community participation methods in design and planning*. New York: Wiley.

The Field Guide to Human Centered Design. (2015). IDEO.org.

Wates, N. (2014). *The community planning handbook: How people can shape their cities, towns and villages in any part of the world* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

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