How-To: Stakeholder Analysis

Why Stakeholder Analysis?

Because forests, watersheds, rivers, and rangelands do not follow the rules of social and geopolitical boundaries, collaboration is often inevitable when working towards a conservation goal. Collaborative efforts involve different individuals and entities who may hold contrasting values and motivations working together across these boundaries. These individuals work together to support the design and implementation of policies, plans, and projects. Understanding each stakeholder’s needs is vital for perceiving and mitigating potential conflicts, helping to efficiently work toward achieving a shared vision.

This how-to sheet will provide tools that can be used for analyzing the needs of and relationships between stakeholders. The person or organization performing stakeholder analysis should strive to be impartial in this process in order to build trust and connect with each stakeholder.

Understanding Stakeholders' Values and Relationships

The basis of stakeholder analysis is understanding the different stakeholders' values and identifying the history and status of relationships between and among them. To best understand these values and relationships, we suggest trying to:

- Understand what each party has to gain or lose in the situation
- Create a timeline of events leading up to the present to better understand relations between stakeholders
- Be sensitive to parties that may feel marginalized, realizing they may not feel comfortable openly discussing certain issues in group settings
- Consider meeting with these stakeholders individually to create a space for openness and trust
- Be transparent with stakeholders on how their input will be used and explain how they can stay involved in the analysis process
- Discern the core needs of each entity and the deeper reason why they are taking a particular position on the issue
- Begin the dialogue process by focusing on common interests to develop trust
- Start this process early. Understanding and addressing differences in stakeholder values and relationships early on can set the collaborative effort up for success.

These strategies can be carried out through the use of many different resources and tools. In the next sections, we'll walk through a few of our favorite tools for stakeholder analysis
How-To: Stakeholder Analysis

Creating a Timeline

A timeline is used to create insight into past events and relations between stakeholders. Listing events as viewed by each party will create a broader perspective of how each party perceived a certain situation and can be used to facilitate discussions between stakeholders. This tool can also enable people to realize that their perspective is only one part of the picture.

The length and detail of a timeline will depend on the relevant context of each collaboration and the history of its stakeholders, but one example of what a timeline might look like follows below (adapted from Fisher et al. 2000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective of Indigenous people living on the land</th>
<th>Perspective of governmental conservation agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990-Attention is brought to a forest ecosystem service area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This forest is sacred land that supplies resources upon which the people depend</td>
<td>Resource use needs to be restricted in order to preserve the ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-Land is designated as a federal conservation area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infringement on religious practices and freedom to use depended upon resources</td>
<td>Implementation of conservation policy to preserve forested land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the timeline with as many relevant steps as needed until you arrive at present-day perspectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tips for Interviewing Stakeholders

When interviewing a stakeholder, especially in an organization, be sure to ask who was involved with this issue before them and reach out to that person for more long-term context surrounding the issue.

Also try using a snowball sampling technique. Ask your interviewees who they suggest you talk to, who might not yet be at the table but should be, or for any other relevant contacts they might have.
How-To: Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder mapping helps collaborators to see tensions and identify allies between all participants. The straight arrows represent little or no tension, the jagged arrows represent an area of conflict, and the size of the circle represents the amount of influence or power that stakeholder holds. It is helpful to create a few maps from different stakeholder perspectives. Consider including yourself or your organization on the map to remember that you are a part of the situation, not above it. The example below illustrates a potential stakeholder conflict map for a forest restoration project, where tensions are present regarding the strategies to restore the forest between land management agencies, private landowners, and conservation organizations.

Example of a Stakeholder Conflict Map for a Potential Forest Restoration Project, adapted from Fisher et al. (2000)

- Circles indicate parties involved in the situation: relative size = power with regard to the issue
- Dashed lines indicate informal or intermittent link
- Double lines indicate a broken connection
- Straight lines indicate links—that is, fairly close links
- Arrows indicate the predominant direction of influence or activity
- Double connecting lines indicate an alliance
- Lightning bolts indicate discord or tension
- Squares indicate issues, topics, or things other than people
The Onion

The onion is useful for parties in negotiation. The onion model is set up to present three layers, the positions that we take publicly, for all to see and hear, underlying this layer is our interests – what we want to achieve from a particular situation, and the most core is the needs we require to be satisfied. When a person feels threatened, they may act from positions rather than needs in order to decrease vulnerability. Understanding the needs of a person develops empathy and may create a more transparent situation as a foundation for effective negotiation. Stakeholders’ needs can often be aligned even if their positions are not.

Worksheet: Understanding Positions and Interests of Parties

Worksheets, like the onion concept, can be useful to identify the positions, interests, and underlying beliefs of stakeholders. This worksheet (adapted from the U.S. Forest Service's Collaboration Cadre (2021)) takes the additional step of identifying ways to address these interests. Try this format to identify these characteristics yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder or Party</th>
<th>Issue Important to This Party</th>
<th>Party’s Position on This Issue</th>
<th>Party’s Interests Underlying This Position</th>
<th>How Can Interests be Addressed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Organization</td>
<td>Land development &amp; loss</td>
<td>Rule from within</td>
<td>Land redistrib., Respect for human rights</td>
<td>Creating more land access opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosses &amp; Landowners</td>
<td>Land development</td>
<td>Rule from outside</td>
<td>Political/econ. control, Access to labor</td>
<td>Identify alternative econ. opportunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How-To: Stakeholder Analysis

Power and Interest Matrix

This matrix can be useful to visualize the interest and power levels of your identified stakeholder. Some stakeholders may hold little power but have lots of interests while others may hold significant power with little interest in your work. Organizing the differences between stakeholders will help you to prioritize your engagement strategies with stakeholders. Considering your stakeholders' relative power and interest in your work, classify them along the axes. The quadrant that your stakeholder falls under may suggest the most appropriate communication and engagement strategy for that stakeholder.

In the example presented here, different stakeholders are placed in their respective quadrant (in red) for the hypothetical example of a forest restoration project. It is important to note that the relative power and interest of each stakeholder will vary on the context of the issue being addressed.

Aligning expectations to minimize conflict

One way to minimize the negative forces facing a collaborative group and to reduce conflict is to work towards aligning expectations between and among stakeholders. See this informational sheet from the U.S. Forest Service to learn more about the importance of aligning expectations and to find worksheets to help groups align.

Expectations and requirements may also depend on the level of required or desired public participation, some of which may be required due to agency policy or law. For more information about the spectrum of public participation, read IAP2’s description.
Conclusion: Diving Deeper

Stakeholder analysis is a crucial step towards establishing a solid foundation for collaboration. Using the tools in this how-to sheet can help you get a better understanding of the parties, values, perspectives, and power at play. Consider further exploring the reasons beneath stakeholder conflict. Often conflict stems from power, culture, identity, gender, and rights. Understanding histories, relationships, and needs of participants in a collaborative project will establish a foundation to efficiently work towards a common vision.

Works Cited and Additional Resources


International Association for Public Participation, 2021. *Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation*.


