Collaborative
Leaders
Network

Tools for

A Community Engagement Strategy for Negotiating a Package of Community Benefits

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Stage 1 Tools

Walkabout

Rationale

- The walkabout allows a sponsor/leader to gather the information needed to enable the actual process to take place. It also explains the larger environment in which the sponsoring organization will be operating.
- The walkabout conveys to a community that the sponsoring organization has a project it needs to undertake, but first wants to understand what matters to the community—both about the project and generally.
- The walkabout also allows the sponsoring organization to understand parallel and contemporaneous events in the community that may impact the process. This can prevent the process leaders from being blindsided by changes in participants' behaviors or views that do not seem related to the process.

Process

Participants in these conversations (either one-on-one or in small groups) will raise several pointed questions that are intended to discern the rationale for the project and the underlying values of the company and the project leader. The leader should be prepared to answer openly and directly questions like these:

- Why does this project have to be done? Have other alternatives been explored?
- Why does it have to be done this way, at this time, in this place?
- Who are you (the leader) as a person?
- What is the character of the company, its culture, its goals, and its history?

To get a sense of community members' perspectives on their environment in general, and of this project specifically, questions like these can be asked:

- "What is your sense of the (particular) situation in Hawaii?"
- "How do you see the sponsoring company?"
- "What is your sense of how this area of the island is perceived and dealt with?"
- "How would you like to be worked with?"
- "How do you feel about the challenges and burdens faced by this area of the island?"

The team working on the project meets regularly to download feedback from community interactions, and to discuss other events in the community that might impact the project. The group uses the information gathered to begin to sketch out a plan for the process of engaging the community.

Stage 3 Tools

Community engagement protocol

The community engagement process can be viewed as a series of building blocks of subjects that appear at most, if not all, meetings to different degrees at different stages of the conversation. The five-part engagement protocol follows:

1. Tell the community before anyone else.
2. Ask the community's permission.
3. Understand that the community may oppose the proposal and/or sponsor.
4. Let the community know that it is entitled to givebacks based on the intrusion into their area—whether it approves, opposes, or is silent about the proposed project.
5. Ask the community for its views on those givebacks.

For example, see: Hawaii Energy Forum Report

Meeting protocols

The context of the process in terms of other activities going on in the community is covered at each meeting.

1. The "why" questions on the project are part of every meeting: Why does the company need the project? Why does it have to be located in our neighborhood? Why now? Answers are provided as questions are raised; they often lead to more and new questions.
2. The criteria for the givebacks are discussed at every meeting. The participants want to ground specific givebacks against a set of guiding principles or criteria, which are refined during the course of the meetings.
3. The givebacks themselves are discussed at every meeting. This begins with some starting ideas at the first session and evolves into a tight set that is then costed out for discussion.
4. The evaluation of the givebacks is saved until the end by the group. They are discussed in relation to each other and as part of a larger package.

While most of these building blocks are likely to be present at each meeting, the elements that are emphasized are likely to shift over the course of the process. The table below illustrates where the focus was placed during four meetings in a case involving the siting of a power plant.

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4
Evaluations	0	0	0	40
Givebacks	10	25	50	30
Criteria	10	15	15	10
Why	40	45	20	10
Context	20	5-10	5-10	5
Protocol	20	5-10	5-10	5

Another way to look at this is to see each meeting as a stage:

	Defining the problem and setting the context	Tentative acceptance and problem solving	Proposal clarification and evaluation	Respectful closure
Evaluations	0	0	0	**40**
Givebacks	10	**25**	**50**	**30**
Criteria	10	**15**	**15**	10
Why	**40**	**45**	20	10
Context	**20**	5-10	5-10	5
Protocol	**20**	5-10	5-10	5

While in this particular case, each meeting moved along to the next stage, this isn't always the case. A stage such as "Defining the problem" or "Tentative acceptance and problem solving" could go on for two or three meetings.

The *pule*

The *pule* can be a powerful and positive way to open a meeting; it does not, in any way, need to be religious. An effective *pule* tends to contain certain elements:

- A call to separate from the events of the day and things that occur before and after the meeting
- A call for a focus on the event or process

- An expression of appreciation for the presence of everyone gathered to work on whatever is the subject of the meeting

Sample wording:

"Let us all take a moment to reflect on this evening's meeting. Let us put aside the worries and thoughts of our day and of what we'll do after the meeting. Let us focus on the reason why we have gathered. We are here to help our community work on the very important issue of ______. We need to gather all of our collective energies and bring all of our best thinking to bear in order to make things better for our community. As we look around, let us be very grateful that so many of us care and are willing to give up our time and energy to work together. We are part of something truly special tonight. And now let us begin."

It's a good idea to ask the eldest and/or most respected person in the room if he/she would like to offer the *pule* or designate someone to do so. In a pinch, the facilitator could do it as well.

Stage 6 Tools

Finding alternatives for dealing with inappropriate remarks

Sometimes someone in the group says something that is particularly hurtful or outrageous. The tendency might be either to cut it off as violating meeting rules (assuming that things like personal attacks were agreed to be prohibited), or to object on behalf of whatever group or person is attacked. There might be another response. Consider the Hawaiian elder who, in responding to a question as to why he did not react to outrageous statements said, "In case you hadn't noticed, the silence was deafening." The lesson for the rest of us is that sometimes it is inappropriate culturally to challenge the attacker directly, so the response is to be silent and let the offending remark "die" without support.

Knowing when to go off-line

At some meetings it becomes apparent that it would be beneficial for the facilitator to meet with a person or persons off-line, at a time and place separate from the group meetings. Below are some circumstances that might prompt this action:

- A key participant expresses a need that is both important to him or her, and seems highly relevant to the objectives of the initiative. In this case, the facilitator might want to work separately with this participant (and, perhaps, a small group) to develop specifics that might become part of the eventual package of givebacks for the entire group to consider. In the interest of ruthless transparency, it is best to acknowledge the outside conversation when presenting the idea to the larger group.
- Some people are invited to attend meetings because of their stature within a particular segment of the community; but their position may not be recognized or accepted by many participants. If the facilitator notices that the person is not being recognized or honored by other participants—

and if it's unclear why the person was recommended for inclusion—the facilitator will want to get to know this person better outside the group in order to understand the individual's role and sphere of influence and impart a sense of respect and validation for him/her.

- Some people behave problematically in meetings, and the facilitator might meet with them off-line to get to know them better, to learn about the reasons for their behavior, and to signal that he or she is comfortable working with them.
- Some people initiate the request to meet with the facilitator outside the group. Depending on the subject matter, the facilitator decides whether the conversation should be brought back into the group.

Different tracks for off-line discussions

1. The "Honoring" track

When the facilitator meets with individuals because of their stature, or because they are behaving awkwardly in a meeting, the main objective is to honor the person(s) by getting to know them and seeking to understand who they are and what's important to them. Often this conversation does not lead to a negotiation. Rather, it results in the person(s) feeling honored.

At times, the company executive, in the capacity of facilitator, might decide to provide some assistance — whether financial or other—that supports the individual(s) in their pursuit of a community goal; this occurs when the support would be important to demonstrate the sponsor's respect for the individual(s) and their group's work. At other times, the facilitator may conclude that a sincere effort to converse with the person(s) and understand them is all that is needed.

2. The "Group Education" track

Occasionally, someone raises a subject—whether in the meeting or away from the meeting—that the facilitator wants to understand better because it might influence the group's problem solving. The facilitator might then proceed to meet with the person(s) off-line to gain a better sense of the issue—after which, the facilitator and the individual(s) would bring the issue back to the meeting, where it would be discussed in a clearer way.

3. The "Negotiation" track

This track can go in one of three ways:

- Negotiation is done off-line, decisions are made off-line, and the group hears the results. (This is not common, because it can undermine the group.)
- Negotiation is done off-line—leading to an agreement about a foundational principle, or a core element of the giveback, or a framework. The basic idea is brought back to the group, where there is further discussion—led by the proponents of that idea—so that the group comes to

endorse it. The specifics are then negotiated off-line. (The group might propose some specifics during the large-group discussion which may be accepted or taken under advisement.)
- An offer is made off-line, responsive to some part of the whole-group discussion.

Process considerations for resolving differences

The first objective is to figure out what really caused the breakdown, and what is impeding further progress: Is it substantive? Is it about relationships? Is it about process? Is it the sense of being dishonored and disrespected? Is it a difference in worldview? Once the facilitator understands what the problem is (or problems are), the second objective is to organize the protagonists in a way that allows them to discuss and resolve their differences.

The decisions being made by the facilitator and process design team involve how to go about reaching the above objectives: Who should the facilitator talk to? How often? In what order? Is it time to bring the key parties together? Is it better to let things cool for a while? The facilitator and process design team are the decision-makers for all of these questions.

Ultimately, it is up to the protagonists to accept the process that is being proposed to them by the facilitator. More important, the protagonists are the ones who decide whether their substantive dispute has been adequately resolved—at least enough to warrant the resumption of the whole-group meetings. Each contending party has to figure out for itself who is authorized to make decisions. The protagonist may be a single person who is also the decision-maker, or he/she may need to obtain a decision from a broader constituency. In some cases, the protagonists may be a group of people, or elders might be seen as the key decision-makers. Whatever the situation at hand, a judgment must be made about who has the authority to make the decision on behalf of that position.

If protagonists have to go back to their community, the facilitator and process designers can offer assistance in a number of ways:

- Have the facilitator (company executive) share information at a meeting with the larger-constituency group
- Advocate with the larger-constituency group to find a solution
- Assist the larger-constituency group with their own deliberations, if they need and want help with their own internal process. (If this stage can be kept short in duration, the rest of the group probably does not need to receive any updates. If, however, this stage takes a considerable period of time or is unsuccessful, the facilitator will need to provide some report to the rest of the group.)

Mediating long-term and short-term views

One common difference is in perspective between those with long-term views/goals and those with short-term views/goals. If this is the case, the path most likely to achieve success is to get the people with the long-term view to accept the validity of the short-term view as well.

It’s usually easier for people with a short-term view to accept a long-term perspective, because they just view the long-term remedies as “add-ons” to their views. Presumably, these add-ons won’t disturb the short-term view as long as the short-term needs are being addressed.

However, people with long-term views have a more difficult time accepting the validity of short-term remedies, which they perceive as substitutes rather than additional elements of a package. Short-term remedies often involve financial payments to individuals or groups of individuals, and are seen as selfish, and for personal benefit. Long-term remedies, by contrast, tend to be strategic and/or environmental. The implementation takes much longer, and the impacts take longer to be seen. In this case, the benefits accrue to the entire community and not to specific individuals.

<u>Understanding the worldviews of others</u>

Various techniques can be used to help each party understand the other’s view. For example, visual display—a cartoon, or a chart, or a picture—can be helpful. Another method is to bring influential and respected parties to the table—elders or other key community leaders—whose opinion might help open the minds of the protagonists. Whatever the technique, the goal is to have one side see the other side’s worldview as having been arrived at honestly—either based on logic, or passion, or faith, or some other force. The objective is to accept that the other’s worldview is different, but it still has its own integrity.

When the facilitator perceives that it was a communication problem that impeded the larger process, resolution may involve a certain amount of shuttle diplomacy. Sometimes, the parties never meet together. When the protagonists have achieved sufficient understanding of each other’s perspectives, the facilitator may communicate this to both sides separately, and group meetings can resume. With the permission of the protagonists, the larger group is now notified of a date for the next meeting.

Stage 8 Tools

<u>The Final Meeting</u>

1. The facilitator begins the final meeting with this frame: “This isn’t final unless you want it to be. We have a set of givebacks that we have heard from you, both during the session and in conversations outside the sessions, could form the basis on an agreement. We want to run through the set and see how this feels to you.” The facilitator follows this with an acknowledgment that, if the group chooses to endorse this set, then the process will come to closure.
2. The facilitator then asks for permission to present the draft set. This is a way of reinforcing that the authority is in the room.
3. The givebacks are summarized in a paragraph or two: What each is; what it will cost; who will pay for it. (For example, the company or the ratepayer.)
4. At the end of the summary the facilitator asks the group if this feels like the right set.
5. Initially, whoever wants to speak, speaks. When that phase is complete, the facilitator has a go-around—making eye contact with each person and encouraging that person to speak. Again, silence is not assent and it is dangerous to consider it as “yes” or agreement. If consent is not

achieved, the facilitator has options: Go off-line to try and work it out or stay in the room and wait it out. (It may be necessary to go back to Stage 3.)

6. When everyone has spoken, the facilitator might say something like, “Is there anything left unsaid? Is there anything else we need to discuss?” It’s important to allow for 2-3 minutes of silence so that everyone sees and knows that people have the opportunity to speak. In addition, the silence lets everyone calm themselves and settle more deeply into the awareness that a substantial decision is being reached.
7. After adequate silence, the facilitator breaks the silence by announcing, “It appears that we have agreement.” The facilitator then reviews the next steps that s/he will take responsibility for.
8. The facilitator may request a *pule* to close the evening, and celebrate the fact that the group and the company were able to do this together.
9. The formal meeting is closed.
10. The participants may want to discuss their own next steps—especially how will they communicate to their constituencies what they supported, and why.