

working with others

Building trust with communities

A guide for staff



Contents

Our experience	4
Step one What do you want to do?	7
Step two Why do you need to work with the community and others?	9
Step three Who do you need to involve?	13
Step four How will you involve them?	19
Step five Let's do it!	26
Step six How did it go and what did you learn?	29
Your questions answered	32
Find out more	36



introduction

The *Building trust with communities* approach



What is different about the building trust approach?

Building trust is about improving the way we communicate with everyone, being more open and seeking to work together.

Every time you pick up the phone or speak to someone face-to-face you are the Environment Agency. Your words and actions have a direct effect on how people see our organisation. The public needs to believe it can trust the information we give and the services we provide. We also need to trust the public and be willing to work with them. We all have a part to play in this.

Traditionally, most public organisations made decisions, let people know what they planned to do and then had to defend their decisions to those who didn't like them. We have followed this 'decide, announce, defend' approach in the past. But following this approach, we run the risk of:

- relationships and trust breaking down – often involving local politics and the media – making our work more difficult in the future
- making decisions without fully understanding relevant issues and reactions, which means that they may not be the most appropriate
- interest groups throwing out our preferred decision, and us having to go back to the drawing board, often at great expense.

The building trust approach is different. It involves working with communities early on to understand their concerns, interests and priorities. We may still make the final decision, but we will have worked with others in developing the solution. At the very least, they will understand our role and why we have made our decision.

We have put together this short, step-by-step guide to the skills and techniques you should be using when

working with communities. This is part of a larger toolkit, which includes training, learning networks and supporting information, on the *Building trust with communities* Easinet site – all designed to help you improve our relationships with communities and others.

We hope you find it useful in supporting your work. We welcome any feedback you may have to help us help you in the future.



Helen McCallum



Paul Leinster

Our experience...

Preparation pays off for British Energy Review

'We are consulting the public on our review of the authorisations for the six British Energy nuclear power stations. The stations are located in five different Environment Agency regions so having a well prepared communications plan for the whole project has been vital to our work. One of the things we did was to have a training day for all the staff who would be at public drop-in sessions. We practised how we would deal with a variety of difficult situations, for example everyone turning up at once, difficult questions and angry people. Our fears turned out to be much worse than reality but the practice gave us real confidence on the day. Meeting the public and discussing the issues has helped me to understand what people are really concerned about.'

Nuclear Regulator, Thames Region

Early action in Winsford

'The storage of hazardous waste in a working rock-salt mine was always going to raise lots of public interest and

concern, not to mention opposition. The Minosus site was the first of its kind in the UK. It was clear that we needed to take an active approach to our work and engage with the operator, local authorities and the community. What worked best for me was being up front with people. Right from day one we tried to provide factual information to quell some of the wild rumours that were flying around. This helped us manage the situation rather than being constantly on the back-foot.'

Team Leader, Environment Management, North West Region

Helping to address anxieties in Sussex

'In January 2006 we received a pollution, prevention and control permit application for a large energy from waste incinerator in Newhaven. The biggest challenge for us is coping with public opinion around incineration.

We decided to sit down early on with our Regional and Area External Relations teams to plan our engagement. They were invaluable in helping us produce a

'stakeholder' analysis, which we then used to decide how we should involve different groups.

One of the results was a half-day workshop with all the parish councils with genuine two-way open discussion on people's fears and anxieties. We received very positive feedback and are now looking at doing similar things with future contentious applications.'

Environment Manager, Southern Region

'Stakeholder' analysis on a shoestring

'Carrying out a 'stakeholder' analysis sounds a costly and time consuming exercise but the principles are very simple and it does not have to take too much time or money. Gathering together a comprehensive, prioritised list of contacts and planning how and when to communicate with them is a fundamental part of the job. Working in this way makes sure important players are not missed out. On the Lower Clyst project, a partnership with local farmers, we did our 'stakeholder' analysis on a shoestring demonstrating

that you don't have to spend lots and involve special consultants, the end result is just as effective.'

Regional Communications Manager, South West Region

Regeneration in Castleford

'Castleford is a real success story. It's paid immense dividends already, for example we have formed new relationships in the community. We worked with local schools, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, British Waterways and the local community. The aim was to restore riverside biodiversity, help to protect people from flooding and improve community access and recreation along the River Aire corridor. This has been a fantastic opportunity to do something positive in the community and promote all the good work that we can do.'

Area Manager, North East Region

‘Do not assume you know what people care or worry about. Asking them is the key to opening up opportunities for partnerships and dialogue.’

Project Manager, ComCoast

Building Trust in Bryn Posteg

‘It got to the point where we were having to deal with complaints every day about this landfill site – officers on standby in the evening and at weekends dreaded the phone ringing. No Environment Officer wanted to take on the role of regulating the site. News that the site was planning to extend and double its capacity only increased the level of aggravation. Local politicians, MPs and Welsh Assembly Members became personally involved and embroiled in vociferous public meetings.

It took a lot of hard work, much of it out of hours, working with and talking to the residents to build up trust with the local community. Now a telephone call from them is a rarity. We facilitate regular but infrequent liaison meetings between the community and the operator which have now become round the table chats over tea and biscuits – long may it continue!’

Team Leader, Environment Management, Midlands Region

A new frame of mind for Flood Risk Management in Devon

‘Building trust is like sharing a story with people. Everyone needs to know the beginning, middle and end to be able to understand it. That is what we have done at Shaldon where managing the flood risk could have been contentious. We’ve shared the problem and are now working with the community on the middle; how we can work together to decide how to manage the flood risk. And before we finish we will work with them to explain the final outcome and give feedback to everyone involved.’

Project Manager, NCPMS, South West Region

Step one – what do you want to do?



Before you think about involving the community and others in your work, it is vital that you and your team clearly understand what you want to do.

Although it may seem obvious to you, it is important to stop and check that you all have the same understanding and expectations. You also need a clear understanding of any boundaries and limitations on the work.

Make sure you can explain our interest in the area or issue, rather than focusing on possible solutions or decisions. For example, you may say that ‘we want to reduce the risk of flooding for residents’, rather than ‘we want to build a flood defence.’

If you do focus on solutions or decisions, the community and others will think you have already made up your mind and this will undermine their trust in us.

Checklist – have you considered...

- What specifically we need to achieve through this work? How does this link to *Creating a Better Place*?
- Whether the Environment Agency has to consult with others by law? If so, who, how and why?
- The boundaries of the work (for example, the amount of staff time available, what you can and cannot change)?
- Timescales for any decisions?
- How you will show that you have met your objective (for example, what do you need to record or monitor to evaluate your work)?

Tips

- ✓ The first step in building trust is to be clear why you think ‘something has to be done’ and to understand whether the community and others agree that ‘something has to be done’. Share the problem or issue before suggesting possible solutions.
- ✓ Think about how you will evaluate your work right at the start – what could success look like and how can you measure it as you go? What questions do you need to answer and what information will you need to do this?



Step two – why do you need to work with the community and others?

Often we will start working with communities and others without being clear exactly **why** we are doing it. We often say we are doing this ‘to consult the community’, but you need to be more specific than this. You will also need to consider why they might want to work with us. You must put yourself in their shoes.

Consider specifically what involving the community will achieve. This will relate back to your objectives from step one. For example, ‘we want to work with the community and others to understand the most acceptable way to manage flood risk’, or ‘we want to understand what will make residents feel safe living near landfill site X’. Reasons may include, to:

- help people trust us more
- help us trust people
- make our decision-making more open and accountable
- make sure the community has a real chance to have their say
- allow others to influence how a project is designed
- encourage the community to own the problem, the solution and their role in it.
- help reduce conflict and/or misunderstandings
- understand the views, concerns and values of the community
- make people aware locally about our work and the role of the Environment Agency

‘Being honest and transparent with people helps to build trust from the outset. It’s as important to explain what you cannot do as much as it is to explain what you can.’

Policy Advisor, Making Space for Water

Not clearly explaining what you want to achieve by working with the community, can lead to:

- falsely raising people’s expectations about how much they can really influence decisions
- involving people in inappropriate ways
- being unclear about the role of staff involved
- being unclear about the role of the community
- the whole process losing credibility when objectives are not met
- not using resources effectively
- people losing trust in us.

Be clear about why you want to work with the community. Is it to:

- **Inform?**
To let others know about something
- **Gather information?**
To gather views to inform our work
- **Involve?**
To work closely with others giving an opportunity for discussion
- **Form a partnership?**
To share decision-making and responsibility with others

We often assume our work with communities and others will take place in a vacuum. But clearly, you need to be aware of any issues that could have an affect on your working relationships. This could include poor relationships in the past, and strong feelings about health or child safety. You also need to see if there are any opportunities to build on work others are doing, such as the local authority.

Working with communities and others is a two-way process. You need to understand why they want to work with you, how they view the problem, what their objectives are and how you can take these into consideration.

To help you consider the issues that affect the work from a range of perspectives, make sure you talk to people from different parts of the organisation to plan the work. You may need to set up a small team (for example, external relations/ corporate services, media team, technical experts, senior management).



Checklist – have you considered...

- What is our role in the work? Are we leading the work or are we a partner?
- Who should be in your team to help you plan and do the work and what would their roles be? For example should you involve the press office? Have you all worked through the building trust steps?
- Why you should work with the community and others?
- Why the community and others should work with you? What do you need to do to understand their needs and concerns?
- Any local issues that could affect your work?
- What can the community and others work with you on? What questions could they have and what decisions could they influence?
- How you will show that you have met your objectives for working with the community and others? For example, what results will demonstrate success?

Tips

- ✓ Explain your constraints but be flexible, and take the time to understand the constraints on the community and others.
- ✓ Make sure everyone understands the Environment Agency's role in the work.

But look out for

- ⚠ The more contentious your work is, the more important it is that you work with the community and others early in the process.
- ⚠ Manage expectations. Communicate clearly what is and isn't going to change as a result of the work.



Step three – who do you need to involve?

Now that you have decided what you want to achieve and why you are working with the community and others, you need to do a 'stakeholder' analysis to help you decide who to involve (for example, statutory consultees, businesses, politicians, local residents' groups, our staff) and how. To do this you will need to list who might be affected or who might have an interest.

The people you will work with can be categorised in many different ways. For example, useful categories include:

- **sector** (public, private, voluntary, community)
- **function** (user, service provider, regulator, landowner, decision-maker)
- **geography** (living within postal district Y, living in flood risk area)
- **socio-economic** (income, gender, age, length of time living in area)
- **effect** (directly affected, indirectly affected, able to affect the work/issue)

- **understanding/experience** of topic X (none, low, medium, high, more than you)
- **known or likely position** (for or against project Z)

Each of these categories is useful for different reasons and what is useful will vary from project to project. You should use these different groupings to make sure you do not forget anyone. It will help you understand what support you will need and who from, and what people might need from you.

You should carry out a 'stakeholder' analysis at the beginning of a new piece of work, and as part of a review of ongoing work.

Think of as many individuals and groups to involve as possible and **don't do this on your own** – work with other people including the community to make sure you get the list right. These questions may help you to think about who you should involve:

- Who will the work affect (positively and negatively)?
- Who might think that the work will affect them (even if you don't)?
- Who could be interested in the work?
- Who is likely to support or object to the work?
- Whose input or knowledge do we need?
- Who has been involved in the past and what have we learnt?
- Who could influence the work (opinion formers and leaders such as MPs, councillors, media representatives and interest groups)?

- Are there parts of the community who are difficult to reach or work with, who should be involved? For example, have you considered the different sectors (private, public, voluntary), vulnerability, diversity, age, interest, geographic areas, deprived areas, ethnicity?

...don't forget your colleagues

You need to think about which people in the Environment Agency might need to know about your initiative and include them on your list. They may be able to help and offer advice or support.

Checklist – have you considered...

- Setting up a database of contacts and information on the groups, people and organisations you will be working with?
- How representative your 'stakeholder' analysis is? Have you covered all relevant groups and people (sectors, vulnerability, diversity, age, interest, geographic areas, deprived areas, ethnicity)?
- Whether other people in the Environment Agency have done similar work that you can learn from?
- What the concerns, interests and priorities of those you want to involve are? Can you build on work we have done with them in the past?
- How the different groups or individuals want to be involved (for example, do they want to be a member of a liaison group, or just get email updates)? It is best to allow them to choose rather than to choose for them.
- Making sure that those that have the strongest feelings and views are involved?
- How you will include other people who become interested in being involved later on?
- Reviewing your objectives for working with the community (**step two**) depending on who you need to involve?
- Finding out what other work is going on in the community (either by us or by other organisations)? Make sure there is no confusion between these activities.
- Using existing partnerships effectively?
- Involving or informing regional or national staff about the work?
- How to work with other decision makers (for example, other regulators, and regional and national government bodies)?

Tips

- ✓ Check out the ‘stakeholder’ analysis guide on the external relations Easinet pages. This will help you to identify people and organisations that you need to work with.
- ✓ No two communities are the same, so take the time to understand their priorities.
- ✓ Remember to keep asking the people involved in the work ‘who else should be involved?’ And ‘how do I contact them?’ Do this every time you make a new contact.
- ✓ Talk to colleagues and other organisations to find out about local concerns and interests.

But look out for

- ⚠ Previous work with the community will affect how people respond now.
- ⚠ Be careful you don’t just work with those people who are easy to work with such as professional people, local groups and people you already talk to. You could end up excluding people who should also be involved.
- ⚠ Communities change over time and with experience. If you have worked with people in the past, don’t assume it will be the same this time.



Progress check – what have I learnt and what are the next steps?

By the end of **step three** you should:

- be clear about what you want to achieve through this work (**step one**)
- know about any legal requirements for consultation
- have a good idea about the main issues of interest and concern
- be aware of any relevant work by us or other organisations in the community
- have clear aims and objectives for working with the community and others which consider both their needs and the Environment Agency's (**step two**)

- have started thinking about how you will show whether you have met your objectives
- know who you need to work with, what their needs might be and how they might want to be involved (**step three**).

The next step is to plan how you are going to work with them.

Step four – how will you involve them?



Now you know what (**step one**), why (**step two**) and who (**step three**), you need to define how you will work with them.

Start by:

- considering how early in the project you will start to involve communities and others (for example, do you want to involve them when you are identifying the problem, devising solutions, making decisions or will you be waiting until the solution is in place?)
- planning how the involvement will develop, which of your 'stakeholders' will you involve when, and what technique might be appropriate.



Once your team has got together to decide the broad approach, you should then develop an involvement plan.

The example below is for a village Parish Council.

This example shows how to begin working with a group. Once you have made contact with them, they may have ideas on how they want to be involved. You should be as open to their ideas as possible.

Your reasons for working with the community must be carefully matched to the most appropriate methods. You will need to use a range of methods to reach everyone. The table below and the table over the page will help you think about this.

Why are you going to involve them?	Why do they want to be involved?	What will you do to involve them (methods)?	When will you carry out each method (with dates)?	Who will lead on each task?	How will you know when you have done it?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want Parish Councillors to be aware of our view of flood risk. To understand their interest in flood risk and the involvement process. To find out who else we should involve. To include Councillors' ideas in the involvement plan. To get the Parish Council's support, and nominated person on the liaison group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the flood risk issues in the area. To share local experience of flooding with the Environment Agency. To have a say in any plans to manage flood risk in the area. To find out how residents can get involved in the decision-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-to-one meeting with Chairman to dispel misconceptions (see minutes of last PC meeting). 	May	Area manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They will be aware of our view of flood risk. We will understand their interest in flood risk and the local experience / knowledge of local flood issues.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend a Parish Council meeting. Does not have to be open to the public, but they need to be aware that it is taking place. 	June	Team leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will know how they want to be involved.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit backed up with something in writing, for example, a handout or briefing note. 	June	Team leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They will understand how they can be involved. They will have had a chance to provide us with other people to contact.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite them to the public exhibition, the public meeting and to join the liaison group. 	Sept	External relations/ corporate services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They will have had the chance to have a say in the plan.

Least influence/
control over the
decision

Greatest number
of people

Type of involvement	Description	Examples of methods
Inform	Provide information, for example to help people understand the issue, or to announce a decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaflets • Newsletter • Briefing note • Displays • Advertising • Newspapers, TV and radio • Video • Site visits • Internet
Gather information	To gain an insight into people's comments, questions and concerns, we need feedback. This can help us understand what people know and what they value.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffed displays • Surgeries • Staffed telephone lines • Internet (inviting feedback) • Public meetings • Surveys, questionnaires and interviews
Involve	<p>Provide opportunities for everyone involved to talk and listen.</p> <p>To understand the issues and concerns of those involved. Although we make the final decision, there is a real opportunity for the community to have an influence. There must be things that can change as a result of their involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Focus groups • Surgeries • Liaison groups (different groups representing specific interests) • Facilitated meetings (meeting managed by a third party who is unconnected to the issues)
Partnership	<p>Provide opportunities for everyone involved to talk and listen.</p> <p>The people taking part share the decision-making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison groups (as above) • Citizens' juries (people representing the views of the community to consider an issue by examining evidence and questioning expert witnesses. A jury report is produced with differences in opinion included) • Facilitated meetings (as above)

Greatest influence/
control over the decision

Least number of
people

Fair chance for all

You need to make sure that everyone who wants to, has the chance to take part. As well as offering a range of methods, you may need to think about:

- **Language barriers**
How will you include people who speak different languages? You may need to produce materials in different languages or use translators at exhibitions and meetings. All correspondence or publishing for a Welsh audience should be bilingual. We subscribe to Language Line, which is an immediate telephone translation service.
- **Cultural differences**
To work effectively with some cultures we may need to think carefully about their specific needs.
- **Meeting places**
Where possible choose venues in the community that everyone can get to rather than expecting them to come to us. Make sure people with disabilities can access the venue easily.
- **The time meetings take place**
Think about the needs of the people you are trying to involve. Be prepared to work outside office hours. Think about the needs of parents with small children or those that work, and public transport availability.
- **Communications**
Consider good communications practice to cover many different needs:
 - *Audience* – what will people want to know, don't just tell them what you want to tell them.
 - *Clarity* – always use plain English to present your messages. For more information and practical advice, go to Plain English on the Easinet A to Z.
 - *Be media friendly* – the media demands material to be written in a simple but specific format. You should talk to your press office.
 - *Design and images* – produce clear and interesting materials which are targeted at your audience.





- *Consistency* – make sure your messages are all consistent and everyone in the project team agrees with them.
- *Variety* – different people respond to different types of information, so you may need to

provide the same information in more than one way. Simply putting information on our website may not be sufficient! Think about the needs of your audience and how you can reach them.




Checklist – have you considered...

- Appointing a suitable team to do the work (with the right skills, experience and knowledge of the issues)?
- Agreeing on an involvement plan that is easy to understand and integrated with all the other work plans (with clear responsibilities, who you will work with, why, how, when and how you will measure success?)
- Making sure senior management are aware and support the work?
- Tailoring the way you work with the community to meet your objectives and those of the community? For example, are the methods clearly linked to the audience and purpose?
- Using a mix of different methods to involve a diverse range of people with different needs, priorities and interests?
- Making sure your plans allow enough time? For example, have you checked that your plans fit with any legal or other project timescales?
- Putting time in your involvement plan to discuss and agree the problem, before you start to work with them on possible solutions?
- How you will explain your constraints and understand the constraints of the community before you work together on the solution?
- How you will make sure that the community are clear about how they can be involved and when, including how much influence they can have on decisions?

Tips

-  You must spend time planning your work before you start. This time is a really good investment!
-  Remember you cannot follow a ‘one size fits all’ approach. You may need to work with different groups in different ways at different times.
-  Don’t forget you should involve your external relations/corporate services and media teams. These teams are a great source of advice, support and skills.
-  Work with other organisations and the community to help you reach those who need to be involved.

But look out for

-  It is better to start working with communities early in the decision making process. The later you leave it, the more likely it is for trust to break down.
-  Don’t work with the media alone. Involve our internal media teams as early as possible. They have specialist knowledge, and existing relationships with reporters.
-  Work with people to explain what you think the problem is and to understand what they think the problem is before talking about a solution. Otherwise you will look like you have already decided what to do.

Step five – let's do it!



Are you ready to start work, check progress and share the results?

Before you start work it is important that you take the time to **stop and check that you are ready**. Think about how you will **monitor and review your progress**, and **share the results**.

Issues will crop up that you didn't expect, and different people will come forward at different stages. You will need to remain flexible and change your involvement plan accordingly. You will also need to make sure that you regularly let people know about progress – both in and outside the organisation.

For ongoing involvement, such as liaison groups, people may start to lose interest when the initial enthusiasm wears off. Think about how you keep people interested and involved.

Most important of all, you need to make sure that your plan to involve communities and others is not an add-on, but that it forms an integrated part of your work. Be clear about how you will use the information you collect from those involved, and what impact they can have on the decisions and actions of the Environment Agency. Where you haven't taken people's views on board, you need to explain why not.

Getting prepared will take longer than you think – plan for this! It is better to be ready early than to be in a panic at the last minute.

Checklist – have you considered...

- What resources (staff time, money, expertise) you will need for each task?
- People's roles and responsibilities (internally and externally)?
- Who else you need to talk to internally (for example, external relations/corporate services, media team, technical experts, senior managers)?
- Whether relevant staff are prepared for enquiries? Do you have the relevant supporting documents, press releases and so on? Does everyone know our position on the issue?
- Reviewing progress regularly to make sure you are doing the right thing. You may have to change your approach as you find out who wants to be involved.
- Thinking about how you will keep people involved (what's in it for the people taking part)?
- Setting up communication channels to let people know regularly how you are progressing and next steps (internal and external).
- Collecting, using, evaluating and feeding back the results of working with the community at each key phase, explaining what it has and has not affected, and why (even when we have not changed our plans).
- Whether you have involved everyone you need to? Keep checking this.
- How you will manage expectations? If you say you will do something, do it.
- What information are you collecting to measure success (this should be linked to your objectives)?

Tips

- ✓ Really listen to other people's views so you can fully understand them. Being open and interested allows you to gather useful information, and understand what people mean and why.
- ✓ Evaluate, monitor and change your work as you go. Details of how you will do this should be in your involvement plan.
- ✓ Keep feeding back information even if there is little to say. It is better to say something than nothing.
- ✓ Keep a record of what you are doing as you go along, rather than doing it all at the end.

But look out for



First impressions count. Make sure you are ready and have everything you need before you start working with the community and others.



Step six – how did it go and what did you learn?

Evaluation helps you to identify whether you have met your objectives (**step one and two**). It also shows you what has worked well and what has not. This information is useful in helping you and your colleagues learn lessons from the experience.

Evaluation does not have to be difficult or take a long time.

Your evaluation checklist should include the following:

- **Objectives**
What did you want to do? Did you achieve it?
- **Involvement**
What was our role? Was this appropriate? Which staff were involved and why? What did they contribute? Who else did you involve and what roles did they have?
- **Methods used**
How did you work with the community and others?
- **Responses**
Number and type of responses. Did you reach all the relevant people? If not, why and what would you change next time?
- **Participant views**
What did the participants think of their involvement? How do they want to be involved in the future (more or less or different type of opportunities)? Do they think it was worthwhile/made a difference?

- **Timescales**
Make a note of the main dates and start/finish times.
- **Costs**
How much did it cost (staff time, running costs)? Have you recorded them?
- **Benefits**
What were the benefits of working with the community and others?
- **Publicity**
How did you tell people about the work (newspaper articles, posters, letters)? Did you involve external relations/corporate services and the media team?
- **Results**
What did you achieve and what has changed as a result? How

would this have been different if you hadn't worked with the community and others? How are you sharing this with staff, other organisations and the community?

- **Follow up communications**
How are you maintaining and continuing to build your relationship with the community?
- **Learning from experience**
How are you sharing what you have learnt and using it in your other work? What information is available (examples of leaflets produced, photographs of displays, the involvement plan)? Is there anything you found difficult which you need more guidance or training on? How are the community using what they learnt?

Tips

- ✓ Ideally, you should include at least some people from outside the Environment Agency in your evaluation.
- ✓ Budget for evaluation at the start of your work (including time and cost).



Your questions answered

Question: What should we do if we don't have the time and resources to work with the community?

Answer: You can make a huge difference simply by learning to communicate better as part of your ongoing work (for example by producing effective exhibition material or information which is easy to understand). This is something that doesn't take extra time. You should also plan your projects so that you include enough time and resources to involve communities. Current Environment Agency policy and guidance support this.

Q: Won't telling communities about a project or idea early on cause more trouble than keeping quiet?

A: No. The best way to reduce the chance of people reacting in a negative way is to give them a chance to express their interests and

concerns early on, before decisions are made. Think of it like an early warning system, or gathering information, which can inform the way you work with the people and issues you are dealing with.

Q: Isn't educating people more important than involving them? Surely, if people knew the facts, they would accept what we say.

A: Simply providing information to educate them is not sufficient. Attitudes towards public bodies mean that we have to work much harder, and be much more open in the way we work to make sure the public trusts the information we give them. You need to pay attention when listening to people and learn how to deal with them as part of your everyday work. People can provide us with useful information and knowledge such as, local expertise.

Q: Is it true we shouldn't go to the public until we have answers or choices on the table?

A: If you wait until you have a proposal, you are following a 'decide, announce, defend' approach. Try to release and discuss information as soon as possible, and involve communities in setting guidelines for and developing plans which affect them. But be clear about what they can and cannot change.

Q: Aren't these issues too difficult for communities to understand?

A: You will need to allow time to share and understand information between you and the communities you are working with. Don't assume that just because people disagree with your ideas they don't understand the technical issues.

Q: Shouldn't technical decisions be left in the hands of technical people?

A: It is very rare that we can make a decision purely on technical grounds. Many groups you will be working with are experts in their own right, with views, values and technical knowledge that are relevant and often vital in achieving results. Give the people you are working with information. Listen to their concerns. Involve staff from different backgrounds in developing policy.

Q: Why should I work with communities if it's not my job?

A: As a public servant, you have a responsibility to the public. There are staff throughout the organisation who can help you work with communities more effectively (for example, external relations/corporate services and the Community Relations Team).

Q&A

Q: If we give them an inch, won't they take a mile?

A: If you listen to people when they are asking for inches, they are less likely to demand miles. Avoid the battle-ground. Involve people early and often.

Q: If we listen to the public, won't we have to devote scarce resources to dealing with issues that are not as important as the ones we have identified?

A: Make sure you are clear about why you are working with communities, and that it makes sense not just to us, but to the public as well. Listening, understanding and being more responsive to the community and others can lead to better results by helping us make better informed decisions, for example through the use of local knowledge, and can help reduce conflict. If there are things you cannot do, explain why and, if appropriate, how they could be dealt with in another way.

Q: Should we exclude activist groups who are responsible for stirring up unwarranted concerns?

A: Activists are often well informed and help to focus and express public feelings. You should work with groups rather than against them. Including them early on almost always gets a better result than excluding them and dealing with campaigns late in the day.

Don't forget...

How we work with local communities and others is just as important as what we do. Use the following principles to guide all the work you are involved in:

- **Clear boundaries** – make sure people know what the Environment Agency can and cannot consider or do and what can or cannot be changed as a result.
- **Providing information** – give as much information as possible and explain if information is missing, uncertain or not known.
- **Showing respect** – show that people's views really do count and will be acted on wherever possible.
- **Feeding back** – let people know about progress and decisions as soon as possible so that they know what is happening when and why.
- **Taking action** – make people feel it is worth their while taking part by showing how they can affect change.
- **Learning** – communities bring valuable knowledge and insights. You have as much to learn from them as they do from you.
- **Being independent** – try to keep personal views, preferences and personalities out of the process.
- **Targeted approach** – different groups have different needs that you need to consider when working with them.
- **Focused on common results** – look for results that make sense to local people not just those that meet our needs.

Find out more

- **Making the most of resources** – always make the best use of resources, especially time. The amount of time you spend should depend on how important the issue is. Time spent early on will often save time and effort later.
- **Part of the bigger picture** – our aim is to improve the environment. Be clear from the start how any work with communities and others can help this.

This is a short, step-by-step guide to help you plan your work with communities and others. It is just one part of a larger toolkit that includes:

- **Training courses** – from short introductory training to more in-depth courses on designing a *Building trust with communities* approach and facilitation skills.
- ***Building trust with communities* Easinet site** – includes lots of extra practical information, for example on ‘stakeholder’ analysis, ways of involving people, case studies and useful links to further advice. You can also find the report, which provides the policy background to this approach and practical advice based on Environment Agency research and experience.
- **Learning networks** – there is a rich source of internal knowledge and experience that can help

support you with this work. For more information contact your area and regional external relations/corporate services teams or the head office Community Relations Team.

Please send your views to:
Community Relations Team
Environment Agency
Rio House
Aztec West
Almondsbury
Bristol, BS32 4UD

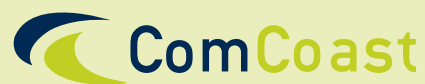
Phone: 01454 205716

Have your say

We hope you find this guidance useful and practical when working with local communities.

We’d like to know what you think about it and how we can improve it to help you work better with communities in the future. To help us all improve how we work with communities we would like to share your experiences, so please contact us with examples of how you are using the building trust approach. We are interested in hearing about positive and negative experiences.

We’d also like to hear from you if you would like to get involved in developing the *Building trust with communities* programme.



The development of this guide has been supported by the ComCoast programme

**Would you like to find out more about us,
or about your environment?**

Then call us on

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Working with Others

Building Trust with communities

working with others

Building trust with communities

A guide for staff





Working with Others

Building Trust with communities

The ComCoast project is carried out in co-operation with ten partners.

- Rijkswaterstaat (NL - leading partner)
- Province of Zeeland (NL)
- Province of Groningen (NL)
- University of Oldenburg (D)
- Environmental Agency (UK)
- Ministry of the Flemish Community (B)
- Danish Coastal Authority (DK)
- Municipality of Hulst (NL)
- Waterboard Zeeuwse Eilanden (NL)
- Waterboard Zeeuws Vlaanderen (NL)

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