**End User and Stakeholder Characterization:**

**A Tool for Integrated Assessments**

Integrated assessment (IA) projects should be developed in collaboration with one or a few influential decision makers – the project “end users” - who seek to use the results. However, IA projects typically engage a larger group of potential end users during the implementation phase than collaborative research projects. This includes stakeholders that may have unique or competing views on the topic. This tool will guide you through a two-step process of identifying potential end users and stakeholder participants, and developing an appropriate role for each in the project. You will likely find it helpful to revisit this process periodically, as the project evolves and you gain a better understanding of your end users, stakeholders and their needs.

## Step 1: Characterizing End Users

**What is an end user?**

*An end user is defined as a person or group in a position to apply the information or tools being produced, evaluated, or transferred through a Science Collaborative project in a way that is of direct consequence to the ecological, social, or economic integrity of a reserve(s) and/or surrounding watershed(s). Examples of end users include, but are not limited to, reserve staff, and public, private or non-governmental decision/policy makers, including landowners, resource managers, land use planners, and educators at all levels.*

*End users should help define the focal issue, clarify the decision making context, identify key stakeholders, and highlight current information needs.*

Understanding your end users and their needs from the very beginning of project development and keeping end users engaged throughout the project helps ensure that the assessment will be influential. Based on your understanding of the management need and potential end users, use the following table to characterize each end user. The following questions are intended to help you through this process:

# Who are your end users?

* What users or user groups have a decision making role related to the issue of concern?

# What are their needs or wants?

* What are the relevant needs or wants for each end user or end user group? What problems are you hoping to help them address?
* What information do you know they need or want, given their decision making context?
* How do you know they plan to use the information?
* What are the known opportunities for the end user to use the information you are planning to work with them to produce? What are the known barriers?
* What do you expect will be the impact of the information you produce?

# How engaged should they be?

* What role do you anticipate the end user will play in the development and implementation of the project, e.g. help define the project goals; facilitate iterative/adaptive learning; testing/providing feedback; evaluation, etc.? How will their engagement in this role enhance the production and usability of the science for this project?
* How frequently do you need to meet in order for them to meaningfully play this role? Note: This and the last question will likely require a conversation with your end user.
* How engaged are they able/do they want to be?

# When do the outputs need to be available to the users?

* When do you expect the end user to apply the project outputs, e.g., during the project, after the project concludes, in a more distant future?

# End User Characterization Worksheet

*Using the above questions as a guide, characterize each known and potential end user by completing a row for each. Add additional lines as needed.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **User**  (name, title, organization) | **Description of need/want** | **Level & frequency of engagement** | **Potential timeline for use of outputs** |
| End user 1: |  |  |  |
| End user 2: |  |  |  |
| End user 3: |  |  |  |
| End user 4: |  |  |  |

## Step 2: Characterizing Stakeholders

**What is a stakeholder?**

*A stakeholder is anyone who is affected by or has an interest or stake in a particular issue. Examples of stakeholders include members of local, state, federal or tribal agencies; business leaders and industry representatives; representatives from non-profit groups or other citizen organizations; and individuals from loosely defined user groups, such as local residents, recreational boaters or farmers.*

*All end users could also be considered stakeholders, but not all stakeholders are end users.*

Based on your current knowledge of the management need and potential stakeholders, use the following table to characterize potential stakeholders. The following questions are intended to help with this process:

# Who are the stakeholders?

IAs focus on complicated issues with a variety of actors and perspectives that influence decisions and outcomes. When planning an IA, consider the different jurisdictions, levels of government and agencies that play a role in a particular issue. Some agencies may be well positioned to use assessment results; others may be interested but have less authority. Identify the groups likely to contribute positively if they are involved or impede the implementation of proposed solutions if their perspectives and interests are not considered. Representation on a project advisory group should be diverse and balanced. Recruit respected people that can represent each side of a contentious issue.

# Why involve stakeholders?

Stakeholder participation should complement the role of project end users and provide unique perspectives on the issue and possible solutions. Consider why you are engaging specific stakeholders, what information you need, and how you will use their feedback. Stakeholders can help you:

* Refine the focal question;
* Understand the policy, social, and political landscape;
* Collect the data, local knowledge, or technical or industry insights necessary for an informed assessment;
* Be perceived as credible or legitimate;
* Identify creative and acceptable solutions to the focal question;
* Ground-truth preliminary results; and/or
* Improve the development of final products and presentation of results.

# How should stakeholders be involved?

Quality engagement of a few end users and stakeholders is more important than reaching a large number of people. IA teams are encouraged to develop a formal project advisory group that includes end users, other relevant decision makers, and representative stakeholders. Invitations to serve on the advisory group should emphasize the contribution of and benefits to participants.

The amount and type of stakeholder engagement will vary depending on the project and topic, and more participation is not necessarily better if it does not suit a specific purpose. Teams may want to keep a larger group of individuals informed about the project through email updates, websites, social media, or fact sheets. IA projects might also benefit by gathering information from stakeholders beyond the advisory group through surveys, interviews, public meetings, workshops, or public comment opportunities for reports. Time constraints, level of interest, and other factors will also determine how much involvement stakeholders want.

See the Integrated Assessment Primer for more information on stakeholder engagement and tips for contentious topics.

<http://graham.umich.edu/water/nerrs/resources/ia>

# Stakeholder Characterization Worksheet

*Using the above questions as a guide, characterize potential stakeholders by completing a row for each. Add additional lines as needed.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Who – potential stakeholder participant** | **Why – stakeholder contributions** | **How – role and engagement** |
| Brainstorm the names of individuals or organizations that are connected to the topic, have a unique perspective, and might participate in the project in some way. | How specifically could each group/individual contribute to the project? Consider the unique concerns of and potential benefits to participants. | How and when should these groups or individuals be involved? What is the best way to communicate with and engage each? |
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