

Stakeholder Engagement in Electricity Projects

This Technical Insight from CIGRE UK is based on the 2013 publication of CIGRE Technical Brochure (TB) 548.

Background

The public and other stakeholders are increasingly becoming involved in energy sector decisions. Just as we feel we have a right to have a say in new building proposals in our own neighbourhoods, people are saying the same thing about major electrical power developments.

The results of a survey of electricity organisations, and other work done by the CIGRE Working Group, present an encouraging picture about stakeholder engagement in the sector. Electricity organisations are increasingly recognising the benefit of stakeholder engagement in their construction projects, not only for the benefits to the projects themselves but also for the development of building relationships with key environmental and citizen organisations. While this is driven in part by legislation, there is evidence that much engagement is being promoted voluntarily by electricity companies.

The Working Group has produced eight key principles (“Best Developed Practice”) for stakeholder engagement for electricity companies. These are:

1. Have a **consistent approach to stakeholder engagement** across your company’s construction projects. Be flexible, varying according to the scale and type of the project, but still be consistent. The aim is to establish trust among stakeholders. They may have information and views that will be of benefit to the proposal.
2. **Scope your engagement needs for the project, in proportion to key project stages.** A lot of effort and resource on engagement at the margins of a project may realise limited additional benefit. It may also be beneficial to engage key stakeholders (particularly those representing different community interests) at the start of a project to establish their views on what they would consider to be a ‘proportionate approach’.

3. **Identify and understand your stakeholders.** Establish a consistent approach to mapping stakeholders and understanding their likely viewpoints, needs and expectations from engagement, and the potential value that could be realised from engaging them. There should be a clear commitment to community engagement at a local level. It is also important to define the ‘voiceless’ or ‘hard to reach’ stakeholders, such as those with mobility difficulties, sight or hearing difficulties, literacy difficulties, a requirement to communicate in alternative languages besides English or stakeholders who cannot easily engage with traditional consultation methods. Identify and target these groups specifically.

4. **Start engagement early.** This helps to build project awareness and understanding, so helping to reduce the risk of ‘surprise’ later. Engage key stakeholders early in the scoping phase to enable them to contribute to the development of effective solutions. Stakeholders must have the opportunity to comment and influence at the formative stage. Be clear about the stage of the project when engaging: stakeholders should not expect all project details to be available at the early stages, and should appreciate that they are being involved in formative stages.

5. **Use a mix of consultation / engagement methods,** depending on the stage of the project, the stakeholder groups involved and their individual concerns, needs and priorities. Methods should be tailored to the required output, such as awareness building, gaining understanding, inviting comments, or enabling constructive debate. Methods could include provision of information through news media; published information sheets or leaflets; exhibitions; websites or other social media channels; on-line questionnaires; discussion events; workshops, perhaps independently facilitated; community panels or other channels more tailored to eliciting views. Dedicated community liaison and engagement staff could be utilised. Regular engagement with key stakeholders will enable relationships to be developed and maintained.

6. **Create an open and transparent process.** Manage the expectations of stakeholders by clearly stating the objectives and scope of the engagement from the outset. Some aspects of a project will be 'out of scope' for consultation, such as legislative or regulatory obligations, however it should be recognised that there may be different ways of satisfying these obligations. Similarly, timescales should be clearly defined at the outset. The engagement or project process should be openly publicised, and be clear, so that as many obstacles to engagement are removed as possible. Project information should be tailored for audiences in format and style, for example, non-technical material or specialist, detailed material.

7. It is important that stakeholders can see how their comments have been taken into consideration. **Feedback mechanisms should be developed** to demonstrate how views have been considered and addressed. It is important to demonstrate not only that engagement has taken place, but that it has been an effective part of the process. Be clear about how views are reflected in, or used to influence, decisions. When comments have been considered but the proposals have not changed, it is good practice to explain why not.

8. Stakeholder engagement should be appropriate for the purpose and should **be proactive and meaningful**. Stakeholders should be involved at project stages where they are able to influence an outcome or decision. The approach to the engagement of citizen communities should be proactive, accessible and inclusive.

Relevance to UK

The forthcoming major investment in the UK's power and energy sector will provide the biggest challenge for the UK Electricity Supply Industry (ESI) in a generation. Besides the issues surrounding generation (new nuclear; offshore wind, etc), perhaps the most

challenging issue remains the issues of community acceptance of built development and trust of the industry.

The general public often oppose new infrastructure projects being built near them, and faced with significant and ongoing increases in home energy costs and without any resolution in sight, are struggling to trust the industry. Already there are mixed levels of understanding of the need for infrastructure, and of the difference between the energy suppliers (the "Big Six"), currently under OFGEM investigation, and the infrastructure and asset owners / managers. With a UK General Election pending in May 2015, these issues may be heightened in the media.

It is for the UK ESI to grasp the issue directly with stakeholder groups in order to generate the essential groundswell of understanding supporting the critical network developments required to keep the UK lights on.

Other Relevant Publications

HM Government : 2050 Pathways Analysis, 2010:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/42562/216-2050-pathways-analysis-report.pdf

National Grid Consultation and Engagement:

www2.nationalgrid.com/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=13794

http://www.nationalgrid.com/NR/rdonlyres/F21F1E3F-F7B8-46BB-BC64-27384C1E61D5/61867/Electricity_Stakeholder_Commitments_1314.pdf

Find out more...

Founded in 1921, CIGRE, the Council on Large Electric Systems, is an international non-profit association for promoting collaboration with experts from all around the world by sharing knowledge and joining forces to improve the electric power systems of today and tomorrow.

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