Communication Management and Stakeholder Engagement
Defining communication and engagement

Good communication is crucial to the success of projects and programmes, and serves a number of purposes including:

- identifying and alerting those likely to be affected by the project
- managing expectations of what will be delivered (and what will be excluded)
- advising on progress
- promoting the benefits of the project’s objectives
- managing negative perceptions of the project
- providing a route for directing questions or feedback
- ensuring information is circulated to the right people at the right time – and in the appropriate format

When a project is managed with a full understanding of what the end-users want, need and think, it will deliver more satisfactory and sustainable outcomes. To achieve this it is vital to communicate with, consult and involve all stakeholders appropriately. It is important to differentiate the three elements of stakeholder engagement and communication and understand their different roles:

- communicating the project
- communicating the project outcomes
- consultation and involvement

**Communicating the project**

The Communication Management and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CMSE Plan) addresses the communications process which should be embedded throughout the entire project. Stakeholder analysis is a key activity in segmenting the various audiences and deciding the frequency, method and content of the messages that need to be delivered which, in turn, informs the communications schedule.

Communication should take place throughout every stage of a project and is a fundamental element of project management. It should be noted that communication, although related, is different to both consultation and involvement (see below).
Communicating the project outcomes

Communicating the outcome or consequence of the project upon completion is distinct from communicating during the project. It is important that the project planning process takes into account the point at which post-project communications need to happen and who will take responsibility for the planning and implementation. The stakeholders involved at this point may well be different from those involved during the project and the key messages will no longer be focused on the progress of the project.

Consultation and involvement

People use many different terms to describe activities designed to enhance citizens’ roles in local decision making: consultation, involvement, research, community engagement. Sometimes these different terms get used to describe the same thing, although there are real differences in meaning:

- **Researching** needs, priorities and attitudes; for example: “here’s what we have found out from feedback or survey results”

- **Consulting** communities about actions/decisions: “tell us what you think and we will take that into account when we make the decision”

- **Involving** communities in shaping plans: “we want to explore options and decide together”

- **Acting together**: “we want to carry out joint decisions together”

- **Empowering** communities to take responsibility for making decisions or delivering services with our support: “we can help you achieve what you want”.

Communicating the project and its outcomes

The CMSE Plan is part of the Project Initiation Document (PID) and describes how information will be shared throughout the project organisation and with the project’s stakeholders. Communication is the giving, receiving, processing and interpretation of information, and effective communication is fundamental to successful project management.

Understanding the scope of the project will help determine who the stakeholders are, and an understanding of their interests and influence is crucial for successful project delivery.
The communication strategy defines how communications will be established and managed throughout the project and is informed by a stakeholder map which:

- identifies stakeholders and assesses their interests and potential influences on the project
- defines when and what information will be communicated, to ensure all stakeholders receive the appropriate level and frequency of information
- sets out how the project will engage with different stakeholders and stakeholder groups
- records how consultation and feedback will contribute to decision making
- determines the format, frequency and content of communications

**Stakeholder mapping**

Anyone with a valid interest in the project is a stakeholder and it is not uncommon for stakeholders to have conflicting expectations of and perceptions about the benefits the project/programme will deliver. The project manager therefore needs to identify, understand and map each stakeholder’s interests and concerns.

- **Identify the stakeholders:**
  Decide who the stakeholders are. Useful classifications are: “internal to the project”, “internal to Leeds City Council” and “external to Leeds City Council”

- **Prioritise and understand the stakeholders:**
  It is important to understand how the stakeholders will be affected by the project and how they are likely to react to it: some may perceive that they will be worse off as a result of the change. Responding to their communication needs is crucial.

- **Create a stakeholder prioritisation/impact matrix:**
  This analyses each stakeholder in terms of their importance to the project and the impact of the work on them. Most stakeholders fall into one of 4 groups and the following definitions are useful when undertaking an analysis:

  - **Positive-Powerful:** These are key stakeholders as they are supportive of the project and have sufficient influence to make a difference.
  
  - **Positive-Weak:** Stakeholders who support the project, but have little or no influence, should be kept adequately informed to maintain their interest and encouraged to promote the project.
• **Negative-Powerful**: Stakeholders who have influence but do not support the project’s objectives should be identified as a risk to the project and engaged to try reduce their potentially damaging impact.

• **Negative-Weak**: Even stakeholders who have little or no influence and do not support the project’s objectives should be kept informed about progress.

**The stakeholder map**

A stakeholder map is created to identify and record the specific interests of each individual or group of stakeholders and determine what success means to them. This allows the project manager to communicate in the most effective way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Interest in project</th>
<th>What success means to them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project owner</td>
<td>The authorisation and funding source of the project. The person who defines the goals and to whom the final results are presented for approval.</td>
<td>Delivery of project outputs to the business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Project manager | That they deliver the project in line with the PID and business case.                          | ▪ Delivery on time  
▪ Delivery within budget  
▪ Managed dependencies |
| Users         | Input into the specification of the product.                                           | They are happy to use the product.                              |
| Contractors   | Designing/building the product.                                                       | Customer sign off and payment.                                  |

The **CMSE Plan** will use the information from the mapping exercise to prioritise the stakeholders. Some stakeholders may participate in the project from an advisory or assurance perspective; others will be a key group for assessing the realisation of benefits; while others still will have an active role in delivering the products. The CMSE Plan should
set out how to keep the most influential and supportive stakeholders engaged, and how to win over or neutralise the sceptics. Where the active support of people who are indifferent to the success could be crucial it is worth considering ways to engage them and raise their level of interest.

Some individuals or groups who perceive that they will be adversely affected by the project may try to block progress; some stakeholders will have a vested interest in the success of the project; some may be interested in following progress and others may be indifferent. Understanding what motivates a stakeholder will help a project manager decide how best to engage with them.

**Effective communication**

Although stakeholders may be both organisations and individuals, communication is ultimately with people and so it is important to identify the appropriate individual stakeholders within a stakeholder organisation. It is important that a balance is struck between generating support and enthusiasm for the work while not falsely raising expectations.

The **communication strategy** is part of the Project Initiation Document (PID): it is created during Stage 2 (Project Start-up) and completed during Stage 3. During project delivery, the project manager is responsible for ensuring that communications are produced according to the CMSE plan, updating it as necessary as stakeholders (and their needs) may change while the work progresses. Where a project is part of a programme, the communication strategy must also define how information is to be fed into the programme.

The objectives of developing a project/programme stakeholder management and communication strategy are to:

- identify all stakeholders and ensure that their specific interests and influence are understood and recorded
- keep stakeholders informed of progress before, during and after implementation or delivery of the project/programme
- inform stakeholders how to contribute to consultation and decision-making and understand their responsibilities regarding the business change that the project will deliver
- gain commitment from stakeholders, thus ensuring the long term success of the changes
- demonstrate a commitment to meeting the requirements of those sponsoring the programme/project
- ensure all those responsible for communication have a shared understanding of the appropriate standards and for the need to provide appropriate tools to engage stakeholders
- establish the information requirements associated with each of the decision-making processes
- define the communication content, recipient(s), format, frequency and any approvals required for all external communications and establish who will be responsible for ensuring the communication takes place
- establish the procedures required to produce and distribute information so that there is consistency in what is produced and disseminated

A project/programme will also need to obtain information from various sources throughout its lifecycle. The communication strategy should identify the information required: who will provide it, when and in what format. It is also important to record how this information will be stored, used and managed.

**Roles and responsibilities**

The responsibility for communications within projects is shared by a number of people:

**Project manager**
- create, implement and maintain the CMSE Plan
- produce a range of reports as appropriate to specific stakeholder requirements, including the project board, project team and parent programme if appropriate
- provide briefings for stakeholder groups and individuals

**Project boards**
- inform the project manager of any external influences that may affect the project
- raise awareness and share information within their respective areas of responsibility
- take ownership of, and report progress on specific parts of the project, for example a particular risk or benefit
Project assurance

- provide independent validation of the CMSE Plan

Project support

- disseminates information on behalf of the project/programme manager
- responds to requests for information and guidance
- ensures that stakeholders are kept up to date with developments and progress

Stakeholders

Stakeholders will receive and provide information depending on their interests and expertise and are responsible for responding to specific communications and providing feedback where appropriate.

Consultation and involvement

The different roles of consultation and involvement

Sometimes a project will be created because research with stakeholders reveals a new need – it is therefore user-led. This research may have been part of another project or a stand-alone project itself, like the Council’s residents survey that researches people’s perceptions of local areas and local services.

Sometimes a project will be created to meet a statutory duty: this is a top-down project. In both cases a well-managed project will use consultation and involvement to check that the detail of delivery is in line with stakeholders’ needs and expectations at appropriate stages throughout its life, not simply at the start and/or at the end.

It is equally important to check that the project has sustainable outcomes and benefits. It is good practice to evaluate the success of the project at a number of points after it closes. One point might be to, immediately as it closes, inform the debrief; another might be, in the medium term, to test if anticipated benefits are being realised; and it may be appropriate to monitor these benefits over a number of years to understand how they evolve.
Clearly the degree of post-project evaluation will differ according to the project context but it is important to be able to evidence success and understand any failures to inform future learning.

**The basics**

For the expert, there is a growing set of guidance and good practice to explore in detail in the ‘community engagement’ section of the ‘corporate communications’ interest area. However, it is important for everyone involved in projects to be aware of some basic issues around planning consultation and engagement:

- plan consultation and involvement as early as possible in order to involve the right stakeholders at a time when it is meaningful to do so

- decide who the stakeholders are - avoid simply placing ‘residents’ or ‘citizens’ all together as one group; consider the different age groups, ethnicities, faiths etc.

- find out what is already known about the issues – it may not be necessary to do all the consultation originally planned if the information already exists

- involve expert support for consultation and involvement – there are a growing number of expert officers both at service level and in the corporate communications team

- decide what there is to consult about – if there are no options on the table, inform stakeholders but don’t consult if they can’t actually affect design or delivery

- decide which consultation and involvement tools will best engage with these stakeholders - one size usually does not fit all

- coordinate your consultation and involvement work - join up with other consultations and involvement wherever you can for efficiency and to avoid ‘fatigue’ in communities that get asked the same things over again

- to support better planning and collaboration, the Council has one central place to register all consultation and involvement activity – the Talking Point online resource

- always feed back the outcomes to those that took part. It is good practice, courteous and encourages future involvement

Further information can be found on the ‘community engagement’ area in the ‘corporate communications’ interest area on the intranet.