

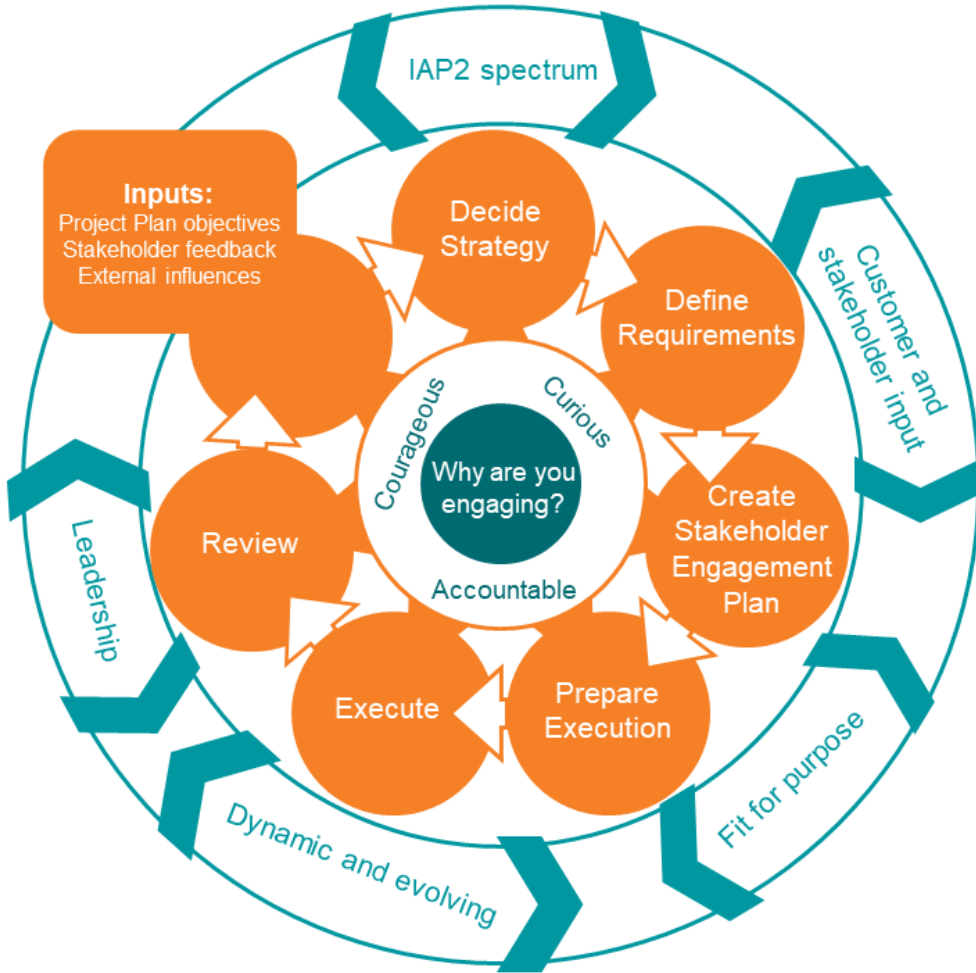


Stakeholder Engagement Framework

2023



Stakeholder Engagement Framework on a page



Our Vision

Empowering communities to share and use energy for a better tomorrow

Our Purpose

To enable energy solutions that improve life

Our Customer Commitment

-  Listen
-  Respect
-  Deliver

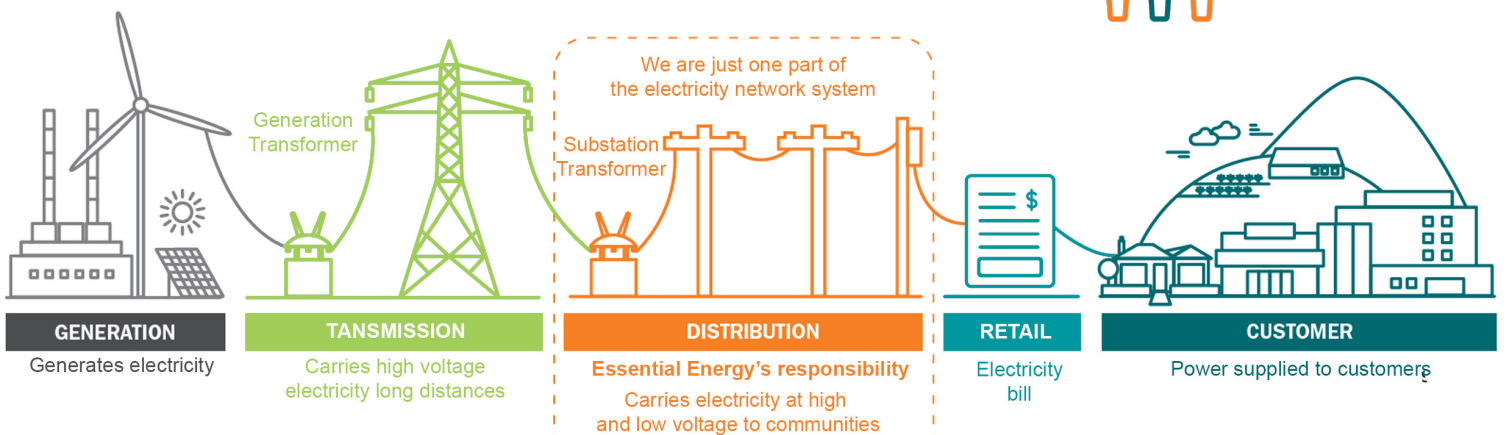
Customer Priorities

Our customer and stakeholder engagement activities have shown our customers value:

- Safety
- Future Focused
- Affordability
- Collective benefit
- Reliability and resilience
- Transparency and simplicity
- Good customer service and communication

Our Engagement Principals

-  Curious
-  Accountable
-  Courageous



Essential Energy Corporate Strategy

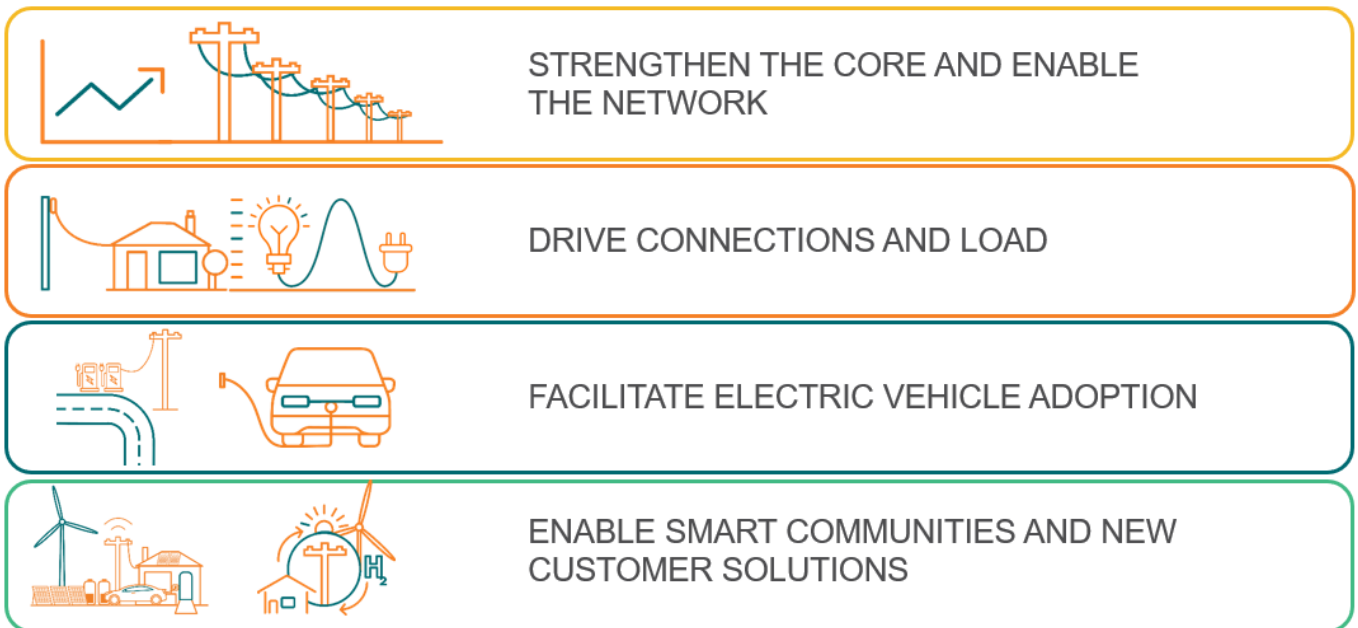
Our Corporate Strategy is shaping our future focus

This Stakeholder Engagement Framework (SEF) aligns with our Corporate Strategy (Strategy), which provides a road-map for Essential Energy's future direction.

Essential Energy operates in a rapidly changing energy market driven by emerging technologies, a customer-centric regulator and changing customer expectations. The company has embraced a requirement to change with enhanced efficiency and a substantial transformation program being implemented. Other market and regulatory changes are also expected to significantly impact Essential Energy's business operations and the strategic options available to it.

In 2018, Essential Energy undertook the development of its first Corporate Strategy to provide direction on the capability uplift required to adapt to the changing energy landscape and has evolved to the current strategy that focuses on four pillars, recognising the need for the significant transformation of the core business while building future network capabilities.

As we become an energy company for the future, we are committed to making our operations environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. Engagement is key to understanding the impact of the decisions we make and acting responsibly in the communities we serve.



“To make good business decisions, we place listening and responding to our customers at the centre of our business using an ‘Outside In: Always On’ approach. This provides genuine opportunities for customers and stakeholders to engage as early in the process as possible. This goes for all areas of our business, and we need to do this authentically.”

John Cleland Chief Executive Officer



Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Customer and stakeholder engagement informs all of our decision-making processes.

Background

Our Stakeholder Engagement Framework (SEF) guides ongoing and effective engagement for all Essential Energy Divisional and Project teams, to support the delivery of our current business activities and future projects. This ensures our products and services are relevant and valued by customers.

The SEF is regularly refreshed to reflect feedback received through consultation, research, the changing dynamics of stakeholders and projects, and emerging trends and important innovations in engagement practice.

Our SEF promotes a culture within Essential Energy that recognises and values working with customers and stakeholders, recognising the diversity of customers and the importance of developing appropriate engagement programs to support customer and business objectives. Application of the SEF helps us to manage material risks and inform strategic business decisions to meet our business objectives.

Our SEF links directly to Essential Energy's Strategic Vision and Purpose, underpins our Corporate Strategy and guides our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, Stakeholder Map and Stakeholder Engagement Plans.

Essential Energy is a member of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), prescribing to the seven Core Values for decision-focused, values based public participation, and the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to measure the influence of customers within an engagement process. This SEF provides the 'How to' engage, articulates our commitments and is a tool for Essential Energy to incorporate customer and stakeholder feedback into our decision making.

We will be



Curious

Engaging early, to build respectful, inclusive, and collaborative relationships with our diverse stakeholders.

Recognising that our stakeholders are diverse, we design our engagement activities to meet the needs of stakeholders, actively seeking feedback to learn and improve.



Accountable

We are transparent, setting clear deliverables for measuring and evaluating the quality of our engagement. Outcomes from engagement are visible to stakeholders.



Courageous

Action-orientated, open-minded and acting with integrity. Our business is continuously informed and shaped by our engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Achievements in 2022:

- > Delivery of the 2022 Corporate Stakeholder Engagement Plan which enhanced relationships with our stakeholders.
- > Delivery of four Customer Advocacy Group forums which provided valuable feedback for the business.
- > Engagement on the 2024-29 Regulatory Proposal including customer forums and co-designing with stakeholders.
- > Engagement on tariff trials generated new ideas on innovative tariffs to suit customers lived experience.
- > Delivery of strategic engagement plans across all areas of the business.
- > Continuing membership of Thriving Communities Partnership, collaborating with other organisations on ways to better support our vulnerable customers.
- > Continuing membership and involvement with the Energy Charter and participation in the Ag + Energy Social Licence Roundtable.

Our stakeholder engagement plans:

- > Establish a new customer council to grow our direct engagement with our customers.
- > Deliver on our engagement programs that support the network of the future:
 - Community batteries
 - Stand Alone Power Systems (SAPS)
 - Electric Vehicle adoption
- > Industry collaboration through The Energy Charter #Better Together initiatives.
- > Delivery of our Reconciliation Action Plan.
- > Continue to build capability and capacity in stakeholder engagement across our business.



Understanding our Customers and Stakeholders

Our relationships are evolving as we interact with customers and stakeholders to inform our business strategy and daily operations. Our community consultation committees, such as our Customer Advocacy Group, provide valuable insight and feedback.

Within each stakeholder group there will be varying levels of interest, impact, needs, concerns, values, wants, ideas, relationships, perceptions, bias and influence. We respect the diversity of stakeholder views, encouraging dialogue to understand the stakeholders perspectives.






Therefore, stakeholder identification and analysis is an integral part of our engagement planning process. For each engagement activity we seek to engage stakeholders who are impacted or interested in our business activity, process or outcome.



Our Stakeholder Engagement Approach

Our approach to stakeholder engagement is based on the IAP2 framework, but designed specifically for each engagement to meet the needs of our business and our stakeholders. It is adapted to support input from stakeholders when decisions are required. More detail about how we use this framework is found in the Appendix.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

	 Inform	 Consult	 Involve	 Collaborate	 Empower
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, and alternatives and decisions.	To work with the public to make sure that concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making.	To place the final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to you and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decision made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will work with you to implement what you decide."
Engagement techniques	Examples: factsheets, newsletters, website Consider: Accessible language First Nations & CALD	Examples: surveys, meetings Required: Prereading material e.g. Discussion paper or video	Examples: workshops, advisory groups, deep dives. Required: Executive and decision-maker participation + Translate complex technical docs into plain and easy language or animations	Examples: Deliberative forum, co-design workshop or People's Panel, Digital Democracy – using Essential Engagement Required: Skilled facilitator	Examples: Citizen's juries, independently governed reference groups. Required: Extensive resource commitment for internal and external stakeholders

Stakeholder Engagement Resource Hub

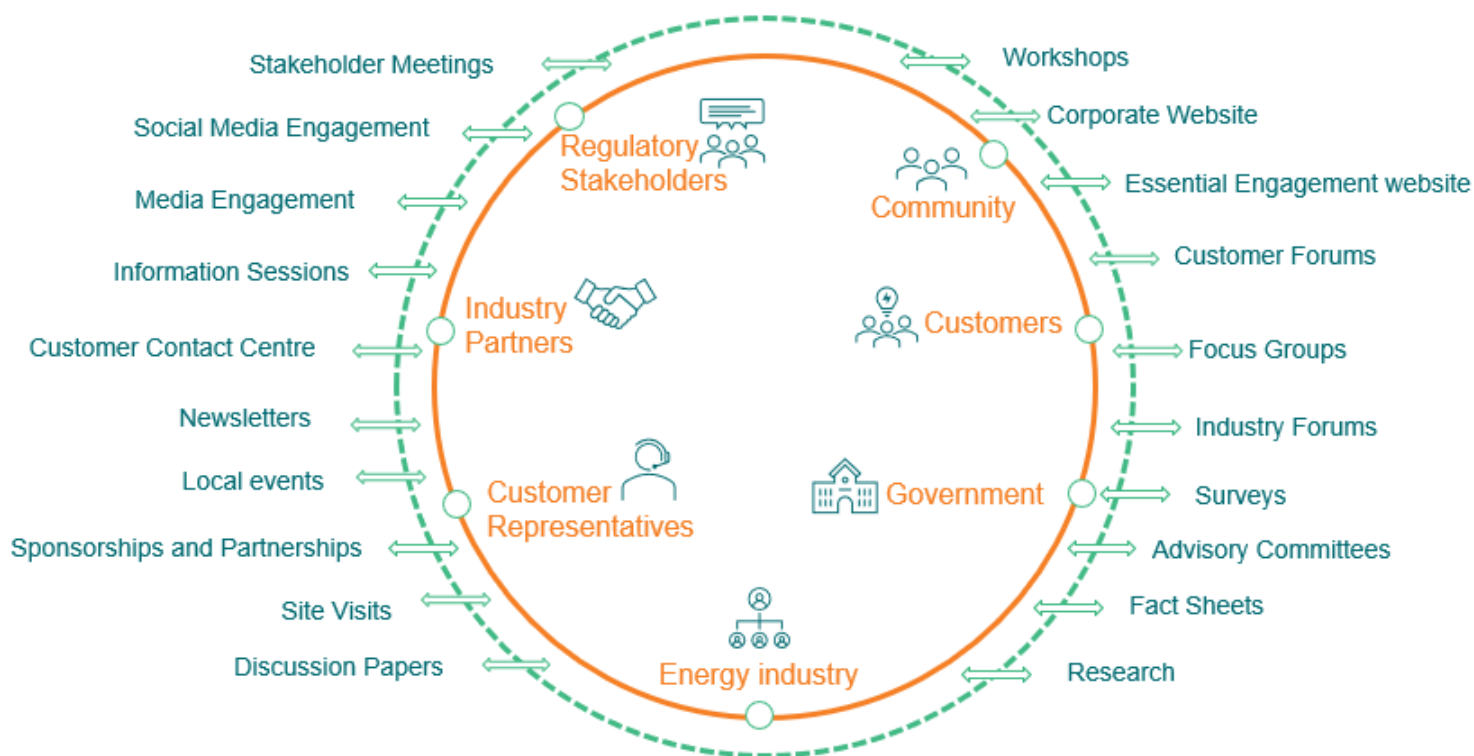
The Stakeholder Engagement Framework is supported by guidance from the stakeholder engagement team, and an internal Stakeholder Engagement Resource Hub has been created to share templates, tools and reference documents and case studies.

It is also a place for employees to share ideas, talk about the different engagement methods and tools being considered, and connect with others working on stakeholder engagement activities.



Our Stakeholder Engagement Approach

Stakeholder Engagement Approach



Evaluation



Curious

- > Stakeholder interactions are recorded.
- > Our engagement plans include a diversity of stakeholders with lived experience.



Accountable

- > SEF published on Essential Energy website.
- > We 'close the loop' and thank stakeholders who participated in the engagement program.
- > Community participation demographically represented.
- > Essential Energy conducts customer satisfaction, brand and reputation research.
- > Peer review of Essential Energy's Energy Charter Disclosure Statement.



Courageous

- > We seek feedback on our engagement.
- > Feedback is used to improve the business.

A checklist to guide you through the engagement planning process.

Step 1	Strategy development: Decide engagement strategy	Page 10
Step 2	Strategy development: Define requirements	Page 11
Step 3	Planning: Create engagement plan	Page 12
Step 4	Planning: Prepare for engagement	Page 13
Step 5	Delivery: Implement engagement plan	Page 14
Step 6	Feedback and reporting: Review engagement outcomes	Page 15

“The engagement to co-design acceptable tariffs to take to trial was undertaken following the onset of COVID. The two rounds of planned face-to-face engagement workshops had to be undertaken wholly on-line.

The Essential Engagement site was utilised to present pre-reading and background material for customers ahead of the workshops and also to gather initial responses to a forum and survey questions – the results of which helped shape the workshop materials. Workshops were held via Zoom, with breakout rooms used to facilitate smaller group discussions.

A Tariff Advisory Panel (TAP) consisting of retailers, customer advocates and an Australian Energy Regulator observer was assembled to road-test the engagement website and workshop materials, the associated questions and challenge Essential Energy’s interpretation of the results.

Overall, the engagement was highly-successful and has resulted in five customer and stakeholder supported trials that Essential Energy would not necessarily have considered in the absence of such a process. Essential Energy’s interpretation of the feedback and the proposed tariffs to take to trial was wholly accepted by the TAP. The engagement exercise was also highly rated by the customers who participated.”

Justine Langdon, Network Regulation Manager.

Step 1 - Strategy development

Decide Engagement Strategy

In this stage:

- > Research and understand the background, project scope, limitations and objective of the engagement
- > Identify risks to engagement
- > Use this information to develop Engagement Plan

Tool:
Engagement Plan Template

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
1.1	Does the project relate to Essential Energy's Corporate Strategy and meet Customer Priorities?			
1.2	Clearly articulate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Project goals > Engagement goals > Desired project outcome 			
1.3	Participate in project risk assessments for key decision-making and business planning processes. For identification of issues and identification of opportunities to involve stakeholders in decision-making .			
1.4	Analyse stakeholder feedback and lessons learned from previous engagement activities.			
1.5	Questions for consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What are the issues you will engage on? > What risks/challenges are anticipated? > Have decisions already been made on these issues? > What factors are not negotiable? > Is community profiling required to understand the nature of stakeholders and the community? > Why are you engaging? > Are there any legislative requirements? 			
1.6	Assess the risks of delivering the engagement			
1.7	Consider the constraints to delivering the engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Political, social, economic, environmental, technical and cultural context > Timing > Availability of resources and budget > Does the team have the skills to engage? How will skills be developed? 			
1.8	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous.			

Step 2 - Strategy development

Define requirements

In this stage:

- > Stakeholder identification and analysis
- > Establish governance

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
2.1	Identify the individuals, groups or organisations critical to the project/issue, impacted or interested; and who might be part of the solution. Tool: 'Our Stakeholders Map'			
2.2	Consider the level of influence the stakeholder will have on the project, and the impact the project will have on the stakeholder. Tool: Stakeholder Matrix			
2.3	Develop the questions that could be asked during consultation, and consider the impact those questions may have.			
2.4	Articulate what is negotiable and not negotiable and how this will be explained.			
2.5	Address the barriers some stakeholders may have to participate in engagement.			
2.6	Be clear about the level of stakeholder participation required, and the level of stakeholder influence on the outcome.			
2.7	Plan for effective engagement to be implemented as early as practical, to facilitate stakeholder input and participation in the decision-making process.			
2.8	Determine the budget.			
2.9	Understand the governance processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Approval process > Internal stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Who should be informed? -- Involved? > Reporting All media enquiries must be referred to Essential Energy Corporate Affairs Team.			
2.10	Invite program partners to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the program.			
2.11	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous.			

"The stakeholder engagement team has been very helpful and generous with their time to build engagement capacity in my team providing the engagement framework and specialist advice to apply the framework.

The High Voltage Customer (HVC) Installation Safety Management Plan (ISMP) is an essential requirement for HVCs to manage the risks associated with operating private HV networks. Essential Energy has strengthened ISMP auditing arrangements recently and to ensure that the HVCs were aware of their accountabilities to maintain their ISMP, a stakeholder engagement plan was developed. The delivery team, including the stakeholder team, outlined a series of engagement actions to ensure the program could be delivered and to mitigate against potential escalations. We are now clearly communicating our position to the business and HVC's."

Jason Lindley, Electricity Network Safety Manager.



Step 3 - Planning

Create engagement plan

In this stage:

- > Set specific objectives for engagement with stakeholder groups
- > Define the engagement activities based on the IAP2 spectrum

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
3.1	Consider the ways the stakeholder may already be engaging with Essential Energy. What opportunities are there to leverage these engagement channels?			
3.2	What are the communication and engagement channels stakeholders may have in their communities? Is there an opportunity to leverage communication and engagement through their channels? > Put yourself in their shoes; what contributes to their world view so that we can reach them through engagement? (e.g. religion, interest group, environmental etc) > What are the human and digital touch points/channels? > What information are they likely to seek about the project? > Who are the community leaders that may be able to facilitate the engagement?			
3.3	Identify opportunities for innovative engagement activities or will 'getting back to basics' be more effective. > What are the most effective engagement techniques which encourage open dialogue?			
3.4	Identify ways to create different virtual, physical, and digital experiences to take stakeholders on the journey of the project. Use a mix of engagement techniques.			
3.5	Engagement activities are accessible, proactive, respectful, transparent and inclusive.			
3.6	If appropriate, establish a community advisory committee.			
3.7	Understand the stakeholder history: > Level of knowledge? > Previous engagement? > Broken promises? > Relationships – positive, negative? > Level of trust? > Do they understand the concepts?			
3.8	Is there an opportunity for CAG members to facilitate participation in engagement activities by their members?			
3.9	Consider employee engagement channels and whether there is an opportunity to facilitate participation in engagement (e.g. Multicultural Working Group, RAP Working Group.)			
3.10	Ask colleagues to review the communication materials prior to publishing publicly.			
3.11	Consider the appropriateness of the material and engagement activity.			
3.12	The communication plan, an element of engagement plan, describes the communication approaches and tools for targeted, inclusive communication and reporting against defined milestones. What information are they likely to seek about the project?			
3.13	Identify opportunities for coaching and support – internal and external stakeholders (building skills and capacity to engage).			
3.14	Establish indicators to measure the impacts of engagement, identifying the measurements of success. > Qualitative > Quantitative			
3.15	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous			

Step 4 - Planning

Prepare for engagement

In this stage:

- > Finalise engagement plans
- > Continue to adjust and refine based on stakeholder feedback

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
4.1	Ensure the engagement plan is timely and has clear objectives and outcomes.			
4.2	Stakeholder participation is representative of the community of interest, and stakeholders are provided practical support to participate.			
4.3	Stakeholder engagement on development of engagement plan. > Parameters have been established with stakeholders, confirming their requirements and commitment to participate.			
4.4	Invite colleagues to participate in engagement activity (builds understanding of engagement and knowledge of project within the organisation).			
4.5	Employees involved in the engagement activity understand their role. A brief prior to the activity is a good idea.			
4.6	The most appropriate person is engaging with the stakeholder (technical experts, management, engagement professionals, decision-makers).			
4.7	Test engagement activities and communications, for example Essential Engagement before going live.			
4.8	Consultation and communication material is approved.			
4.9	Participants are provided pre-reading material.			
4.10	The right approvals processes have been followed.			
4.11	All engagements and strategies are recorded and reviewed throughout the project.			
4.12	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous.			

"The stakeholder engagement team provided the stakeholder engagement framework and collaborated with our team on strategy. This enabled our team to educate customers on SAPS technology and how we can provide energy to customers in new ways. The education and collaboration required to ensure customers understand the benefits and impacts of moving off grid to an Essential Energy owned SAPS is critical to the success of the program. Feedback received from customers on their desire for environmental sustainability is helping to inform our customer engagement documentation and decision making framework to ensure Essential Energy can enable customers desires to reduce the impact of climate change."

Warwick Crowfoot, Standalone Power Systems (SAPS) Delivery Lead



Step 5 - Delivery

Implement engagement plan

In this stage:

- > Engage and collaborate with our stakeholders
- > Seek feedback
- > Record our interactions and stakeholder feedback

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
5.1	Consultation activities address needs of stakeholders, delivering the most appropriate level of engagement.			
5.2	The communication and engagement plan has been integrated into the project schedule and is reported on through team meetings and regular reports.			
5.3	Be clear who is the dedicated contact for questions from stakeholders and community.			
5.4	Key messages are tailored to meet the needs of relevant stakeholder groups and individuals.			
5.5	Communication and engagement material is clear, accurate, and timely.			
5.6	Mechanisms are in place for feedback to stakeholder groups and regular communication and reporting.			
5.7	Prepare for and manage emerging issues.			
5.8	Evidence of consultation activities are captured.			
5.9	Additional stakeholders may be identified throughout the engagement process therefore refine effective and relevant consultation and communication materials.			
5.10	In the event of intensified opponent activity and need for outrage management, employees and identified stakeholders will have access to training and development to support engagement program delivery (e.g. resilience training, IAP2 training, outrage management training). Sometimes the environment in which employees engage can be challenging. Employees should be equipped with appropriate training and participate in engagement activities to develop skills and build resilience for these situations.			
5.11	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous.			

Step 6 - Feedback and reporting

Review engagement outcomes and 'close the loop'

In this stage:

- > Monitor and evaluate our engagement activities
- > Review engagement program against IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard
- > Thank participants
- > Summarise and report the outcomes of our engagement with stakeholders
- > Use the feedback as input into future strategies including the Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Ref.	Check Point	N/A	Yes	No
6.1	Evidence of clear and transparent reporting on community engagement activities is demonstrated. Closing the loop: > Thank participants > Explain what we did, what we heard, what we agreed to. > What are the outcomes? > Are there improvements due to listening and engaging with customers and stakeholders? > What are the next steps?			
6.2	Records to include details of engagement including who was consulted and why, channels used, dates and times, objectives of engagement, what was discussed and issues raised, and details of the feedback and commitments met.			
6.3	Participation in a project team Lessons Learned Workshop identifies successes and areas for improvement.			
6.4	Lessons learned and the benefits of engaging are incorporated into an action plan.			
6.5	Complaints and concerns have been actioned as per Essential Energy's Complaints Policy.			
6.6	Employees within Essential Energy, engaging with external stakeholders, have appropriate training and development.			
6.7	Review to ensure we are being Curious, Accountable and Courageous.			



Have your say

Our customer engagement is always on. You can provide feedback on our plans in a number of ways:



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