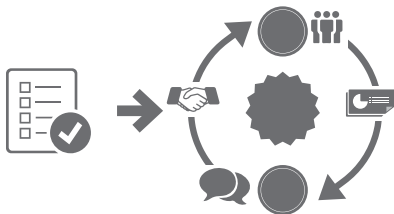# Successful public engagement

Lessons learned from carbon capture and storage projects

Effectively engaging the local community is a critical first step in any development project — projects have been sunk due to improper, ineffective, or inadequate public engagement. Public engagement is even more critical for carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects, as CCS is relatively new and unknown to most stakeholders.

The Pembina Institute conducted interviews in 2013 with CCS project developers to discuss the successes and challenges of each project's public engagement strategy and to identify successful practices. The eight key lessons learned are highlighted here.

Project Team — Dedicated engagement team — Knowledge and information — Stakeholders — Concerns and options — Trust and empowerment — Success

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1. Go beyond regulations

- Engagement activities for CCS projects have gone well beyond the activities required by law or regulation.
- Regulations outline "bare necessities" for public engagement, and not best practices.

2. Dedicate resources

- Top-level management must be committed to these activities and to integration of project management, development and engagement teams.
- Engagement is about building relationships, and this takes months or potentially years to develop.
- This activity cannot be managed from the "side of the desk."
- Feedback from engagement activities must inform project development.

3. Define success

- The objective of your engagement should be to educate the public about the project and to address specific concerns, either by clarifying how risks are managed or re-evaluating plans to resolve issues.
- You can do everything correctly, and still not get the project accepted by the community. You cannot expect to change people's values.
- You will lose trust if local values are not respected.
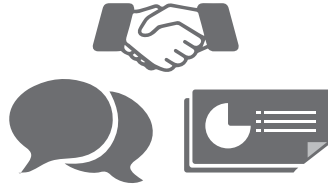
4. Be flexible

- You should not expect to strictly follow a formalized engagement plan; you must start by listening to the concerns and addressing them directly.
- Successful engagements followed guidelines on "how" to engage with people, not "what" to engage on.
- You are required to listen and adapt to concerns. This is a two-way process that builds trust.
- Remain open to local/community suggestions and incorporate them whenever possible.
- You must be available for multiple interactions with the same stakeholders.

5. Create a safe place to talk

- To receive honest feedback, you must create an environment where people feel comfortable and confident in voicing concerns.
- Make efforts to bring all stakeholders — project staff as well as the public — to the same level of understanding.
- Provide all information in an easily accessible form (i.e. visually).
- Understand and respect the values and concerns of stakeholders.
- When a concern or value is in conflict with project goals, be honest and up-front about it. Stakeholder values may conflict, but trust may reduce perceived risks.

6. Think local

- Try to identify mutual benefits for the community. This may lead to discussing jobs and other economic benefits, but can also include simple solutions like infrastructure improvements (repairing a bad road can go a long way toward building respect).
- Fostering a sense of pride in the project is important. Once CCS is understood, many stakeholders (usually from industrial locations) felt a sense of ownership and pride in the development.
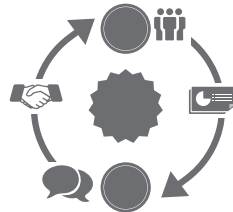
7. Empower stakeholders

- The public perceptions scan showed that the public is interested in learning more about CCS, but many still do not fully understand the technology.
- Trust stakeholders with the information and knowledge you impart to them. Any withholding of details will erode trust.
- You cannot form their opinion, but you can inform their opinion.

8. Create and sustain trust

- All activities of an engagement should work towards building trust with stakeholders.
- Even if a stakeholder does not support your project, they may not object if they trust that you will develop it properly (in accordance with their concerns).
- Give people a voice. Locals want to feel they are being considered in the development. This typically requires one-on-one dialogue with stakeholders.
- Don't start engagement with a firm project; you must present stakeholders with what you are considering and gauge their responses.

- Start the process early. Engage and inform local stakeholders before promoting the project in the media or elsewhere.
- Choose your messenger wisely. Well-known and established organizations already have a developed public persona. You must consider whether this fits with your development.
- Partnerships with other supportive organizations/industries are very helpful in building trust and aligning the conversation.