Stakeholder Engagement in Practice
Now is the Time to Act!

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Abstract. This paper shares extensive experience in the practical conduct of effective stakeholder engagement and its application to issues facing the radiological protection profession today. In our current atmosphere of participatory governance, stakeholder engagement is a useful tool for building partnerships, based upon honesty and trust, between affected and interested parties dealing with radiological protection issues. Key and recurring features of effective stakeholder engagement include: being proactive, open and inclusive, honest, responsive, and transparent using two-way dialogue. Stakeholder engagement can be most beneficial in decision-aiding and decision-making as it leads to informed and sustainable decisions that are able to be implemented because of the broad support created in the process. It is also important, when dealing with issues having radiological protection implications, to establish a multidisciplinary team of professionals (e.g., physicians, agronomists, psychologists, sociologists, senior management, lawyers, law enforcement), as appropriate, to deal with the entire spectrum of issues important to stakeholders. Clear roles, responsibilities and rules for interactions, as well as establishing common goals, will further enhance the probability for successful stakeholder engagement. The radiation protection professional of today and certainly of the future needs new skills to enhance their ability to conduct effective and efficient stakeholder engagement. This paper will also discuss the need to establish these teams and build trusting relationships with stakeholders now so the profession can provide appropriate support for the nuclear renaissance, properly prepare for response to malevolent acts using radioactive material, and effectively deal with other issues facing the radiological protection profession today and in the future.

KEYWORDS: Stakeholder; stakeholder engagement; stakeholder involvement; emergency preparedness; multidisciplinary teams.

1. History and Purpose

Over the last two decades, the process of stakeholder engagement has matured into a useful tool for radiological protection professionals, and others, to build sufficient consensus and support to allow for agreed upon actions to be taken on difficult issues. The natural evolution of stakeholder engagement, in the development of radiological protection policy, regulation and operations, has been from the historical approach of governments or those in authority to decide, announce, defend (DAD) their decisions, which evolves into a process of meet, understand, modify (MUM), which then evolves into an approach of share, open, negotiate (SON) with stakeholders in the decision process [1].

Working within our current democratic society, there is an ever-increasing demand by those affected or interested in radiological protection issues to participate in a more open and meaningful way in decisions affecting them and public health in general. This move from *representative governance*, where decisions are left to others in authority, to *participatory governance* puts greater pressure on those making public health policy and decisions to use a more open and inclusive decision process, with two-way dialogue, and be seen as taking actions responsive to concerns raised. In this current atmosphere of participatory governance, stakeholder engagement is a useful tool for building partnerships between affected and interested parties dealing with radiological protection issues. Given this relatively recent change in governance, with the associated enhanced expectations for participation in decisions, it then becomes clear why there is less, to no, acceptance today for the DAD approach. Organizations which are abandoning the DAD approach then move on to adopt the MUM approach in order to meet these enhanced expectations for involvement, and eventually then adopt the SON approach for stakeholder engagement in their decision process [1].

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There has also been an evolution in who is thought to be a stakeholder. Earlier, the *public* was considered by many to be the stakeholder. Now stakeholder is thought of as those affected or interested parties in a decision. Stakeholder today can include an immediate supervisor, the company Chief Executive Officer, organized labour, special interests groups or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), politicians, and the medical community. In today's world, stakeholder is anyone who can contribute to advancing or stopping a proposed activity. Stakeholders or stakeholder groups will be unique to a specific interest, and as a project or activity progresses these stakeholders can be expected to change, so it can be a fluid mix of participants depending upon the activity or decision under consideration. Effective stakeholder engagement is creating trust between parties, through a process of negotiation, to allow an action or activity to proceed.

Stakeholder engagement does take some time and dedicated resources, but it is time well spent as a decision can be reached and action can be taken instead of the historical situation where time and resources are spent in court challenges to decisions made without stakeholder engagement. It may not prevent initiation of legal action, but if done well, and within the provisions of the relevant legal system, it can at least reduce time and overall resources. For countries that use this approach, early stakeholder engagement in decision processes are working and are effective in leading to sustainable decisions that can be implemented, due to their broad support.

It is important to note that the final agreed upon decision or approach from engagement with stakeholders may not be the decision or approach initially envisioned, but based upon the input and participation of stakeholders it will be a decision or approach that will have sufficient support to allow action to be taken. When done well, stakeholder engagement establishes a network of interested parties that provides a sound and solid basis to allow action while also providing a meaningful defence to challenges in the future that would otherwise delay action.

2. Features of Effective Stakeholder Engagement in Practice

Some key and recurring features of effective stakeholder engagement in reaching decisions include being: proactive, open and inclusive, honest, responsive, and have a transparent decision process using two-way dialogue. Long term success, in both advancing proposed actions and building partnerships with stakeholders, is establishing and providing sufficient resources to create a feedback system to validate assumptions and expectations made in the decision process, and establish a mechanism, which includes stakeholders, to use that information for continuous improvement. The following sections will discuss each of these key and recurring features of effective stakeholder engagement.

2.1 Be Proactive

The time to identify, embrace and engage stakeholders is during *a time of calm*. Building relationships of trust with stakeholders is best done during the planning stages of a project rather than when responding to a radiological event or emergency. The probability for success is dramatically reduced after an event or crisis has occurred and you are then trying to identify and engage stakeholders who may be distrustful as you will already be in, or be seen to be in, a defensive position. Now is the time to take action to identify and engage stakeholders that will be affected or interested in the decision process affecting existing or planned activities. Now is also the time to be proactive and look at existing operations and forecast future scenarios that will benefit from stakeholder engagement (e.g., support for the nuclear renaissance, malevolent uses of radioactive materials, patient exposure to radiation).

Be prepared for the engagement. For example, prior to reaching out to stakeholders concerning an issue, research available information on the issue. Establish a repository, such as a web page and library, where available information is compiled and openly available. Write and include in the repository authoritative, honest, and scientifically sound responses to currently identified concerns about the proposed issue. Announce the availability of these documents and information, through for example a press release, and invite feedback and comments. Look upon this activity as an opportunity

to inform, provide authoritative information to the decision process, and create a common language, knowledge base and understanding to better inform discussions and the decision process.

Take action now to establish the multidisciplinary team of professionals that will be needed to address and be responsive to all the issues associated with the proposed action or activity. There are many activities and events that have a radiological component, but there any far fewer that have solely radiological considerations that can be solved independently by the radiological protection professional. For example, support for recovery after the explosion of a radiological dispersal devise (RDD) in a metropolitan, downtown area. Certainly there are significant radiological considerations in the response to, as well as during intermediate and long-term recovery from such an event. However, there are also significant issues beyond radiological considerations that will require a large and diverse multidisciplinary team of professionals to deal effectively with them, in partnership with stakeholders, in order to restore stakeholder trust and confidence. There will be issues of evacuation of potentially contaminated people including those with special and medical needs, parents access to their children at school and day care on the day of the event, the site will be a crime scene involving local, state and federal law enforcement, medical issues during response and evacuation as well as long-term concerns regarding radiation exposure, freedom of movement, uncertainty about jobs, relocation of businesses and other commerce and trade issues, compensation, concerns of teachers to properly inform their students on events, local cultural groups concerns, the list goes on and on. Planning and discussion to address these and other scenario's, such as support for the nuclear renaissance or the current increase in radiation exposures to patients and medical professionals, should be initiated now to establish multidisciplinary teams that will take action a this time to increase the probability of success in the future, maintain public trust in their institutions and government, and promote public health and well being.

In cooperation and coordination with other organizations and stakeholders, establish strategies, rules, plans of action and milestones to proceed on identified issues. Write in clear, common language so everyone can understand all information and documents under consideration. This will be most important in creating a common goal for all parties, including stakeholders, to work toward collectively. Milestones should include a clear discussion of impacts when milestones are met or missed. This will also help focus attention to actions that will support success, with a clear understanding by all parties of the benefits of success and what is at risk if milestones and success are not achieved.

2.2 Be Open and Inclusive

In effective stakeholder engagement it is critical in building trust between parties to be *open and inclusive*. This means the decision process is open to all affected and interested stakeholders as well as being open to new ideas and approaches. The decision process should embrace these divergent opinions and protocols should be established for dealing with alternative views to assure they get due consideration.

An open decision process also means that funds are available to support participation by stakeholders. It is important that meetings be scheduled for times and locations that would allow full participation by stakeholders. Resources should be commensurate with the complexity of the issue, with sufficient resources dedicated to the stakeholder engagement process to provide timely, authoritative responses to stakeholder issues and concerns. If insufficient resources are provided to address stakeholder issues and concerns then stakeholders will feel that their views and concerns are seen as unimportant, or worse trivial, to the sponsors of the process, and the sponsors have no respect for them or their views. This will result in a loss of trust by the stakeholders. Documents and information should be clear and use common language and stakeholders should have free and open access to them, well before the first meetings of parties. The results of meetings and agreements reached should be published, and there should be a mechanism for feedback on available information to provide timely responses to any questions stakeholders may have.

To further support an open and inclusive decision process, in addition to the conduct of direct and community meetings, modern communication tools should be used to optimize the distribution and exchange of information and thus enhance the opportunity for participation and interaction. The use of state-of-the-art media, such as the internet, web pages, web casts, pod casts, and televideo conferencing, should be evaluated and used as appropriate.

Truly effective stakeholder engagement will also be open to including and accepting independent reviews and monitoring of the decision process and post decision actions. Providing resources for these decision processes and post decision actions will provide significant reassurance to stakeholders concerning the effectiveness of the process and implementation of agreed upon actions. This will also contribute greatly to building trust between all stakeholders.

2.3 Be Honest

Successful stakeholder engagement is based upon establishing trust between parties and being *honest* in all dealings with stakeholders is essential to establishing and keeping that trust. In presenting information to stakeholders, it is important to fully disclose what the radiological profession does and does not know on the issue under discussion and to present the information factually and in an unbiased way.

It is also important to be honest about the expectations for the stakeholder engagement process and communicate them to early in the process to stakeholders. The stakeholder engagement process can be effectively used in decision-aiding or decision-making. It is not intended to nor does it replace legal requirements for authorities to make decisions and take actions. It can however inform the decision maker on the views of stakeholders concerning decisions and can provide some alternatives not previously considered. The decision maker can then be knowledgeable about the consequences of decisions being made.

2.4 Be Responsive

Being responsive is about being *respectful*. It is very important, particularly during the early stages of stakeholder engagement, to show respect for their ideas by spend time listening to stakeholders to better understand their point of view and learn about the concerns that are critical to them, rather than to constantly provide presentations and discussions of technical issues and documents. The stakeholder engagement process should also clearly demonstrate that actions are being taken that address their views and are responsive to their issues, concerns and comments.

The formality of the process is dependent upon the complexity of the activity, but during the development of the stakeholder engagement process agreements should be reached with stakeholders on response times for answers to questions and concerns. A tracking system may also be needed to monitor these activities and provide timely and periodic reports to stakeholders and sponsors on response times and outstanding issues so all parties are kept informed and corrective actions taken to increase efficiency.

2.5 Be Transparent

It is critical to the effective, practical implementation of stakeholder engagement that the stakeholder engagement and decision process be *transparent*. Transparency here means that decisions have yet to be made and the stakeholder engagement process is being initiated to inform decisions. There should be no hidden agendas or alternative activities underway that would compromise or undermine the stakeholder engagement process concerning decisions under consideration. All documents and other factors that would contribute to a decision should be shared with everyone so all parties have the same information upon which to make an informed decision.

A transparent stakeholder engagement process is one where, depending upon the magnitude of the activity, formal procedures for the conduct of these activities are established and agreed upon by all parties. In establishing these procedures, at least the following should be considered for inclusion:

(a) Rules for the establishment and conduct of meetings;
(b) Who will take the minutes of meetings;
(c) Who will approve of meeting minutes;
(d) Timeline for posting meeting minutes;
(e) Identification of issues and concerns;
(f) Methods for addressing issues and concerns;
(g) Establishment of working group(s), for a specific amount of time, to address an issue or concern and periodic progress reports provided back to the entire group;
(h) Establishment of a "parking lot" where contentious issues can be placed and strategies developed to then address them;
(i) Funding of activities;
(j) How differing professional opinions will be dealt with;
(k) How progress will be reported and to whom; and
(l) Who will provide and how will senior management be briefed and advised on outcomes and agreements reached concerning the issue under consideration.

2.6 Use Two-Way Dialogue

In the conduct of stakeholder engagement it is also critical to use *two-way dialogue* between all parties, as contrasted with one-way communication. Adopting the term and concept of two-way dialogue makes it clear that interactions between parties will be a two-way or back and forth exchange of ideas, thoughts, and information. This builds a common understanding and creates shared values on the issues under consideration, rather than the traditional one-way delivery of information or communication of ideas and thoughts, with the hope that the other party understands. This fundamental shift in the way participants will interact with each other dramatically improves relationships and the building of trust between parties.

2.7 Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Another aspect of effective stakeholder engagement activities in practice is the establishment of *feedback that results in continuous improvement* of not only the process but also implementation of the outcome. Initially feedback will be on the effectiveness of the stakeholder engagement process to address and resolve issues leading to an outcome acceptable to all parties. During the stakeholder engagement process, leading to a supportable decision or outcome, the feedback program should also establish the data and information needed to validate assumptions made in reaching agreement. Once implementation of the agreed upon activities are initiated, the feedback program data and information should be carefully monitored and timely corrective actions taken as appropriate, in coordination with stakeholders. It may even be necessary to support the establishment of a program of independent data or monitoring collection in order to assure the independence of the information collected.

This program of feedback and continuous improvement during the implementation of agreed upon actions should also provide the opportunity to identify and celebrate each *success* as it occurs. It is important to identify and celebrate each success to further strengthen the positive relationship and trust that has been built between all parties during the stakeholder engagement process. As assumptions are validated and expectations realised through the feedback process, the confidence of stakeholders will be improved and with each success, trust will be enhanced. This improvement in trust will result in increased confidence by stakeholders that translates into less need for direct involvement in planned activities as long as feedback continues to support expectations.

3. Opportunities for the Radiological Protection Profession

The radiological protection profession is a science-based profession that is best prepared for, and most comfortable when dealing with scientific and technical issues. The radiological protection professional

is not well prepared for, and therefore not comfortable, when dealing with the softer issues associated with engaging stakeholders in decision processes associated with their work. In fact, many professionals become offended and defensive when involved in open discussions concerning their work activities and the basis for their decisions.

Clearly the radiological protection professional must have a strong foundation and thorough understanding of radiation risks, including how those risks are assessed and managed. But in our contemporary society they must also have the skills necessary to effectively engage with stakeholders in order to optimize their contribution. Academic curricula should include ethics and the enhancement of interpersonal skills. Training programs in the work place should include role-playing and other methods and tools that increase the confidence and experience of radiological protection professionals to effectively engage with stakeholders.

The roles and responsibilities of the radiological protection professional of today need to be critically reviewed and redefined. In many cases, because there is a radiological component to an issue, the radiological protection professional is put in the lead position for addressing and resolving an issue with stakeholders (e.g., expansion of activities at a site, clean-up of a site contaminated with radiation, long-term medical monitoring). Due to the multi-dimensional aspects of issues facing the profession it would be more efficient use of the radiological protection professional resources to allow them to focus on radiological issues. In doing so the effectiveness of the profession will be enhanced if they are seen as providing independent, accurate scientific and technical information to inform all parties in the decision process. To deal with other than radiological issues, the lead responsibility for dealing with stakeholders should be assigned to a professional better schooled, trained and experienced in stakeholder engagement activities and relations with the public.

There is also the opportunity for professional societies to provide training and experience for their members in stakeholder engagement and thus increase their member's confidence and experience in engaging with stakeholders. The International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) could also take a leadership role by adopting stakeholder engagement as a guiding principle or professional expectation for how radiological protection professionals should conduct themselves and their business when assigned responsibility for decisions affecting individuals and society in general [2].

Existing documents on the subject of stakeholder engagement should be collected and made available to professionals and societies to advance radiological protection professional's skills and comfort for effective engagement with stakeholders. Some countries have been dealing with the issue of stakeholder engagement for a number of years and they have created some very good documents on the subject. A particularly helpful document in creating or enhancing existing stakeholder engagement programs and protocols is published by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and entitled, *Stakeholder Involvement & Public Participation at the U.S. EPA* [3]. This EPA document, and others, should be evaluated for use by professionals and organisations developing or in the process of enhancing their stakeholder engagement programs. International radiological protection organizations should also embrace and promote stakeholder engagement to collect and disseminate lessons learned and best practices in the practical conduct of stakeholder engagement. This activity should build upon the pioneering work and leadership provided by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), Committee on Radiation Protection and Public Health (CRPPH) in stakeholder engagement when dealing with radiological protection issues. The NEA, CRPPH conduct of three workshops on stakeholder issues and the experience of working with stakeholders in the recovery after the Chernobyl accident are informative and could form the basis for establishing a repository of lessons learned and best practices in stakeholder engagement [4,5,6,7,8].

The radiological protection profession should also evaluate its societal responsibility to continue enhancing our quality of life through the appropriate use of sources of radiation. International organizations and the profession should take the initiative to establish multidisciplinary teams of professionals to engage with stakeholders on a number of issues facing the profession and society concerning the appropriate use of sources of radiation. The international organizations and multidisciplinary teams of professionals should engage with appropriate stakeholders to establish what

actions need to be taken to inform decisions and make a meaningful contribution to the nuclear renaissance, in order to contribute to the initiative and assure public safety and security.

In a World of ever increasing concern with the malevolent use of radioactive material, the international organizations and multidisciplinary teams of professionals should engage with appropriate stakeholders to establish and evaluate plans and programs for the response to malevolent acts using radioactive materials to assure proper planning and response is in place not only for the initial response to the act but also for the long term recovery of the affected people and area. The document entitled, *Framework for Environmental Health Risk Management*, can be most helpful in establishing a stakeholder engagement program to plan for or evaluate existing programs [9].

In addition, there is also the issue of ever increasing radiation exposures to patients from the increasing us of diagnostic procedures using radiation and radioactive sources. Establishment of a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including the medical profession, and engaging stakeholders representing patients and manufacturers to hold open discussions on this issue could lead to greater understanding of this trend and perhaps result in actions that would reduce patient exposures, with no compromise of patient care.

There are other long-standing issues facing the radiological protection profession. These include radioactive waste and disposal, cleanup standards and procedures, and planning for long-term recovery after an accident that would benefit from the enhanced understanding resulting from stakeholder engagement. As more experience and confidence is gained and practical stakeholder engagement becomes the norm international organizations and professionals should pursue these issues to ensure that progress in these areas is achieved.

4. Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement is an effective tool that the radiological protection profession should adopt and implement in their decision process, in order to create sustainable decisions that can be effectively implemented. Use of the stakeholder engagement process to address issues facing the profession provides the opportunity to take action on issues because of the broad support created through the process.

Features of effective and efficient stakeholder engagement include being: proactive, open and inclusive, honest, responsive, and transparent using two-way dialogue. Depending upon the complexity of the issue under consideration, it may be necessary to establish a formal strategy, define rules, develop plans of action with milestones, delineate roles and responsibilities, and dedicate sufficient resources to support the stakeholder engagement process. It is also important to establish a feedback and continuous improvement program, initially for the stakeholder engagement process itself, and then for the implementation of actions agreed upon during the stakeholder engagement process. It is this feedback and continuous improvement feature that allows all parties to validate assumptions made during the decision process, have information needed to further enhance the program, and identify that expectations are being met.

Academic programs, international organizations, and professional societies should provide radiological protection professionals with much needed education, training and experience in the conduct of stakeholder engagement. Current academic and training programs do not provide sufficient knowledge and experience to engender confidence in the conduct of stakeholder engagement so radiological protection professionals are slow to embrace its use. Radiological protection professionals would also benefit from a more clear delineation of their role and responsibility in the conduct of stakeholder engagement activities. Establishment of multidisciplinary teams of professionals, with the appropriate delineation of roles and responsibilities, would also contribute to ensuring that all stakeholder issues associated with major decisions facing the profession and society are addressed.

The opportunity also exists for international organizations and professional societies to embrace stakeholder engagement as an expectation for professional conduct and take a leadership role in

implementing a program to enhance the professions skills and experience in conducting these activities. Existing documents on the subject should be collected and disseminated via the web, and a program to capture lessons learned and best practices should be established and broadly distributed.

Lastly, the radiological protection profession should evaluate its responsibility to society to enhance our quality of life through the appropriate use of sources of radiation. International organizations and the profession should take the initiative to establish multidisciplinary teams of professionals to engage with stakeholders on a number of issues facing the profession and society concerning the appropriate use of sources of radiation. The responsibility and role of the profession to make a contribution to the advancement of the nuclear renaissance, preparations for response and recovery from malevolent uses of radioactive material, and the ever increasing radiation dose to medical patients are just a couple of current issues that would benefit from the conduct of efficient and effective stakeholder engagement to inform decisions that would result in action.

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