**Stakeholder Engagement**

Every organisation relies upon good relationships and engagement between its stakeholders. For membership or representative organisations, this is particularly the case, since engagement and support to members is the primary output of their work. Failure to engage effectively with stakeholders can affect your reputation and everything else you do.

Stakeholders are people, groups, or organisations that have a direct or indirect stake in an organisation because they can affect or be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives, and policies. Key stakeholders in a business organisation include creditors, customers, directors, employees, government (and its agencies), owners (shareholders), suppliers, unions and the community from which the business draws its resources.

Although stakeholding is usually self-legitimising (those who judge themselves to be stakeholders are de facto so), all stakeholders are not equal and different stakeholders are entitled to different considerations. The intention is to ensure that you make the most of your work by communicating as effectively as possible with the audiences you are trying to reach.

Stakeholder engagement and participation practices are increasingly becoming part of mainstream business. They are used as a means to improve communication, obtain wider community support or buy-in for projects, gather useful data and ideas and provide for a more sustainable decision-making.

The potential advantages of implementing high-quality engagement procedures will include:

* strengthening democracy by encouraging more active involvement by communities and other stakeholders
* improving the quality and sustainability of the services provided by the organisation
* building a greater community cohesion.

Organisations will have many stakeholders and each of them will have a distinct type of interest and level of involvement, often with diverse and sometimes conflicting interest and concerns. Carrying out a stakeholder mapping exercise will allow you to consider the relative interest and involvement of your organisations stakeholders, and help you to start planning your engagement approach.