

# Stakeholder Engagement & Communication Strategy

## Introduction

Throughout the United States, government agencies promote public participation as a vital element of water infrastructure and resource management. Improvements to water infrastructure systems have an increased chance of a successful rollout when a large portion of a population is involved in the decision-making process and the ensuing implementation of a community-supported plan. Local stakeholders, who may have been previously underserved, add legitimacy to the governance process through the input of unique local knowledge and values. A holistic strategy embraces all stakeholder groups, aids government institutions in their efforts to build trust and pathways for accountability, and reduces conflict with the communities they serve.

In theory, efforts to involve more people in decisions about water infrastructure systems may appear straightforward. However, in practice, public outreach and input endeavors in the United States routinely fail due to inaccurate assumptions, outdated information, ill-advised communication methods, and the lack of full community participation. A municipal lead pipe replacement program must avoid the common pitfalls of failed government-community interaction.

A holistic stakeholder engagement and communication strategy provides critical links to all aspects of a municipal lead pipe replacement program, including equity and mapping initiatives. Such a strategy embraces the *human* aspects of water and helps expand a municipal agency's operating lens – beyond the arc of managing water supply, quantity, and economics (e.g., water fees and capital costs) – into the domain of resource stewardship. This document summarizes an inter-related six-step process for stakeholder engagement and communication during a lead pipe replacement program and provides associated timetables and hypothetical expected outcomes of each step for illustrative purposes.

## Approach

1. **INVESTIGATE** the potable water service line network (i.e., the "built environment") with a people's perspective on the pipes. Namely, how do residents live within the built environment from the standpoint of water use, water quality, and water accessibility?

*Timetable:* Approximately Months 1 through 4 of project

*Example outcomes:*

- Understand the many uses of potable water in people's homes, gathering places, neighborhood small businesses, places of worship. For example,

do residents who are Muslim feel comfortable using tap water for performing their ritual ablution of using water before prayer?

- Understand the historical characteristics of a community's water profile. Is there stakeholder pride in their community's water resources? Are there existing programs in place around conservation and/or stormwater runoff that can help explain how residents perceive their shared water resources?
- Understand where and under what circumstances water users share potable water delivery systems in under-served segments of the community. For example, a mother may believe that her home's tap water supply is dangerous, causing her to routinely walk across the street to fill up jugs of water for drinking, cooking, washing, and bathing.

2. **IDENTIFY** real-time examples of the four forms of capital (political, cultural, social, economic) critical to human development in the area of interest. Additionally, identify the power, wealth, shared icons, and norms of behavior that frequently appear in stakeholder groups.

*Timetable:* Approximately Months 3 and 4 of Project

*Example outcomes:*

- Community leaders in churches, Rotary, and school boards (political capital) understand the concerns of their constituents and maintain long-standing relationships, places of gathering, and mailing lists with those groups.
  - A shared icon (cultural capital) is a river that flows through a city, and residents use the river for recreation, fishing, and transportation. The iconic river is identified as a defining cultural icon of the community.
  - A shared behavioral norm (social capital) is that farmers who are Hmong hold a weekly farmers market to sell produce grown in a local watershed, and numerous members of the local Hmong community oversee the logistics of running the market. It is discovered that there is social capital in the high degree of trust among farmers participating in the market.
  - A non-profit organization that teaches urban youth how to build boats results in young adults securing carpentry jobs because they have the requisite skills. Increased opportunities for wealth creation (economic capital) for underserved members of a community are observed.
3. **ANALYZE** locations where positive and negative capital (see step 2 above) exist in the community. For example, where are areas of *bankrupt social capital*, in which a lack of trust between community members causes increased levels of fear and uncertainty because there are not any community clubs or groups that embrace shared behavioral norms? Conversely, where is capital being built in the community? Explore any *pareto-optimal* capital formation: events in which an

improvement of stakeholder status (and trust) occurs without a corresponding loss of status (and trust) for another stakeholder in the community.

*Timetable:* Approximately Months 5 and 6 of project

*Example outcomes:*

- Positive: city leaders can identify local sites where stakeholders gather and share their experiences together. These places (parks, neighborhood grocery stores, churches, hardware stores, hair salons, etc.) are conducive to recruiting local leaders who can help build trust and educate stakeholder groups on the process of replacing lead pipes.
  - Positive: a government program focused on health and nutrition communicates in multiple languages to community members of varying levels of education and literacy, which results in robust participation.
  - Negative: an after-school community center closes due to neighborhood gentrification (low-income families pushed out in favor of wealthy retirees).
4. **DESIGN** the specific details of the pipe replacement program, stakeholder communication plan, mapping strategy, and plan for training and educating domestic water users.

*Timetable:* Approximately Months 6 through 10

*Example outcomes:*

- Plans are explained in multiple languages, with graphics and text free of jargon and technical terms, which can often disenfranchise or discourage stakeholders who otherwise would like to be involved. Emphasize constructive and creative education plans. Relevant visual tools that draw on local capital (step 2 above) are critical.
  - From the investigation, identification, and analysis (phases 1-3 above), draw on stakeholder reference contacts, gateway contacts, and community leaders who should be appointed as trusted sources of information. These appointees can help explain plans and build shared expectations within neighborhoods and sub-sections of large municipalities.
  - Holistic education initiatives will result in intra-generational (present day oriented) and inter-generational (future oriented) equity such that investment and education efforts balance the needs of present day and future stakeholders.
5. **GUIDE** the stewardship of human resources, oversee the QAQC of pipe replacement processes (e.g., how vendors conduct work) from a human/residential perspective, interact with and mentor stakeholder groups, and motivate change when necessary.



*Timetable:* Approximately Month 10 through Project Completion

*Example outcomes:*

- Strategically accelerate the lead pipe replacement process.
  - Stakeholders receive clear guidance on how their neighborhoods and homes fit into the overall design of a pipe replacement effort. This helps create conditions of shared expectations among government agencies, contractors, and most importantly, community members who rely on institutions to provide clean water.
  - Community appointees (who already have earned the community's trust) recruit additional participants from the community to help serve as neighborhood guides, listen to stakeholder concerns, and motivate changes in stakeholder behavior when there are disputes and/or conflict between stakeholder groups. For example, a leader in the Latino community who is part of a house of worship can recruit a fellow member to help mentor stakeholders who may be confused about or distrust the lead replacement process.
6. **TRUST** building among stakeholder groups (e.g., engineering firms, government agencies, construction firms, residents, NGOs) that allows for the evaluation of stakeholder plans, continuous improvement of the overall pipe replacement process, and long-term consensus between similar and disparate stakeholders.

*Timetable:* Approximately Month 1 through Project Completion (continuously throughout the project)

*Example outcomes:*

- Avoid paternalistic behavior from government officials, infrastructure engineers, and policy makers which causes stakeholder alienation and inaction.
- Receive accurate and valuable information from community leaders of all backgrounds (age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, socioeconomic status, etc.) which helps municipalities avoid relying on data of suspect fidelity, veracity, and integrity.
- A lead pipe replacement program, supported by a diverse group of stakeholders, can additionally result in increased trust in non-water related government programs and municipal initiatives. It can also result in increased revenue from water users who have an increased willingness to pay their water bills.