



# ENGAGING PEOPLE ACTIVELY

This strategy is developed for all EPA staff in order that we remain relevant, responsive and respectful of the people we work with.

‘At EPA, every time we interact with someone, we have a chance to improve Victoria’s environment. Imagine what a goldmine for environmental improvement these interactions would be if we could improve all of our engagement with people and organisations. We must all make this happen!’

Mick Bourke  
Chairman, EPA Victoria

## EPA VICTORIA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY 2007–2010

### BACKGROUND

EPA Victoria’s purpose to protect, care for and improve our environment is underpinned by four delivery objectives and a set of four values. These are:

#### OBJECTIVES:

Increase resource efficiency  
Reduce emission impacts  
Enhance our reputation  
Benefit the economy

#### VALUES:

Collaboration  
Innovation  
Integrity  
Respect

Achievement of these objectives and demonstration of the values will require EPA to build on existing strengths in order to improve our approach to community engagement.

### THIS STRATEGY AIMS TO:

- Embed community engagement as core business
- Establish a shared culture and common approach to engagement
- Clarify the behaviours we need to demonstrate in all aspects of our work
- Identify and prioritise our requirements for ensuring EPA has the capabilities and systems required to effectively engage
- Ensure we learn from each others’ community engagement experiences
- Ensure an integrated approach to engagement that allows the best use and application of our resources.

### WHO IS ‘THE COMMUNITY’?

The community EPA engages with is broad and diverse. It includes communities of interest and place, such as licence holders, local government, the education sector, individuals who make pollution reports and stakeholders in policy development. It also includes communities that we want to engage with more, such as large users of energy and water, householders and interest groups wanting to make change, and agencies we partner with to achieve organisational goals. Just as importantly, it also includes EPA staff.

# What changes will we see over the next few years?

EPA has a history of working well with industry and communities to achieve environmental gains. With changing community expectations, increased complexity of environmental issues and a more sophisticated approach to government processes, we are being asked to make further changes in the way we engage with communities and stakeholders. We need to demonstrate behaviours aligning with our values such as outlined below:

| IF WE ARE FAILING TO LIVE BY OUR VALUES WE WILL ...  | IF WE ARE SUCCESSFUL IN LIVING OUR VALUES WE WILL ...  | KEY EPA VALUE  |
|--|--|--|
| Only talk to industry and licence holders when we want something from them (focused on our needs) or when we can't avoid it. | Talk to people as partners. We develop enduring relationships/partnerships and see ourselves and our needs as part of the equation for solving complex environmental problems. | <b>Collaboration</b><br>– Together we achieve common goals and deliver results.                |
| Think ... 'If only they (the public, industry or community) understood, then they'd realise we were right'.                  | Think ... 'We don't have all the answers – we are looking to communities and stakeholders to identify concerns and collaborate on solutions'.                                  | <b>Respect</b><br>– Value different perspectives and approaches.                               |
| Make internal EPA decisions that affect everyone, tell them about it and then defend those decisions.                        | See vigorous and proactive dialogue and discussion in the organisation about issues that affect our people and ideas for the future.   | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Make sure our actions always match our words.                            |
| Forget the Principles in the Act and narrowly interpret the powers and programs available to us in the Act.                  | Be guided by the Principles in the Act and choose wisely from the range of the powers and programs available to us in the Act.   | <b>Collaboration</b><br>– Invite open interaction as we share our knowledge.                   |
| Conduct ad hoc, reactive engagement – respond when it goes 'bad' often at the end of a project/issue.                        | See purposeful, planned and proactive community engagement – built in at the start of a project/issue.   | <b>Innovation</b><br>– Outward looking and thinking to the future.                             |
| Deal with the licensee and the broader community separately.   | Bring industries and communities together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.   | <b>Collaboration</b><br>– Together we achieve common goals and deliver results.                |
| Hold information close to our chests.  | Be free with information – 'good' or 'bad'. People are able to access what they want from us easily.   | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Build and maintain trust and credibility.                                |
| Move to the next project/issue without review.   | Review our engagement activities, celebrate our successes and learn from our mistakes.   | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Acknowledge and learn from our achievements and mistakes.                |
| Use one approach to fit all situations; be prescriptive and inflexible.  | Be flexible and plan our approach for each situation.  | <b>Innovation</b><br>– Question and challenge the prevailing.                                  |
| Say ... 'I'm not sure what to do or how to do it when it comes to community engagement!'                                     | Say ... 'I know what I need to do, I have some skills and I know how to get support/assistance'.   | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Accept personal responsibility for our decisions and actions.            |
| Say ... 'I haven't got the time to do this'.   | Say ... 'I have more time to deliver important outcomes when I do the engagement properly'.  | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Make timely and sound decisions based on the best available information. |
| Have EPA people unprepared to take a risk and admit mistakes.  | Have EPA people prepared to share mistakes and learn from them.  | <b>Integrity</b><br>– Acknowledge and learn from our achievements and mistakes.                |
| Be captured only by the vocal interest groups.   | Work inclusively with the breadth of people who are impacted by a particular issue/decision.   | <b>Collaboration</b><br>– Invite open interaction as we share our knowledge.                   |

# What will EPA do to achieve success?

EPA will focus on eight (8) core elements over the next three years to improve the way we engage with communities and stakeholders. Whilst effort will be applied across all eight core elements each year, the focus for each year is highlighted below.

## FOCUS YEAR 1 (2007–08)

### LEADERSHIP

**Demonstrating organisational commitment to good engagement practices – starting at the top! Strategic initiatives:**

- Executive Management Team and Unit Managers outline their own development plan to build their community engagement skills.
- Identify EPA flagship projects or activities that will proactively include good community and stakeholder engagement.
- Develop a corporate map of current and future stakeholders and communities, and the engagement risks we face.
- Recognise and celebrate the successes and the people who show leadership.
- Governance arrangements established to oversee the implementation of the strategy, redefine initiatives and assess performance.
- Adopt and implement the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) community engagement model for EPA (see insert).

### STAFF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**Building on existing skills, providing opportunities to learn new skills and embedding engagement in existing training programs. Strategic initiatives:**

- Skills assessments undertaken for 30% of staff in 2007–08, 20% in 2008–09, 20% in 2009–10.
- Foundational community engagement training targeted towards 10% of staff in 2007–08, 20% in 2008–09, 20% in 2009–10.
- Specific training developed to help develop specific skills (e.g., working with difficult people). Implementation in year 2.
- External learning groups accessed to enable colleagues to share experiences and learn from each other.
- Appropriate aspects of community engagement embedded in other EPA core training and induction to become authorised.
- Community engagement development run for managers and executives to further develop skills at these levels.

### STAFF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

**Providing EPA staff with the support they need to engage effectively. Strategic initiatives:**

- Community engagement advice provided to key projects via the 'Community Engagement Network'<sup>1</sup>.
- Tool kits, resources and manuals are made accessible and available for all staff via the intranet and library.
- Provide a decision support tool to help with proactive and consistent assessments of emerging contentious issues and to help define an appropriate course of action.
- Preparation and debriefing of key community interactions provided as a standard protocol.

### BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

**Providing opportunities for the Victorian community to learn about and develop environmentally sustainable behaviours. Strategic initiatives:**

- Define EPA's role in fostering sustainable behaviours and efficient use of resources at the community and stakeholder level.
- Review EPA's education program and develop a future plan.
- Review EPA's Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan program and develop a future plan.
- One core project identified to undertake Ecological Footprint learning with a community group.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 'Community Engagement Network' includes the Community Relations Officers, the Community Support Unit and other key people from other units.

---

## FOCUS YEAR 2 (2008–09)

### UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Undertaking social research and applying this knowledge to enhance our responsiveness. Strategic Initiatives:

- Undertake research to understand community, agency and stakeholder needs and expectations of EPA.
- Applying current and future social research and mapping data to projects/issues at the start of the planning phase.
- Provide and seek out avenues for building ongoing proactive relationships with key stakeholder groups.

### STREAMLINING EPA'S ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Improving the organisation's systems and processes to provide a streamlined service and reduce workload and confusion. Strategic initiatives:

- Information management systems installed to manage clients, issues and interactions with stakeholders and community groups.
- Develop recording and reporting mechanisms in order to track our engagement.
- Establish feedback loops in order to continually assess effectiveness of our information.
- Provide follow-up training and implementation of risk communication principles.

## FOCUS YEAR 3 (2009–10)

### DEVELOPING AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH

Engagement is the way EPA does business. We are known for our service and our willingness to meet multiple outcomes. Strategic initiatives:

- Systematically embed community engagement into core EPA work (e.g., the operations manual, alternative sentencing provisions, public conferences, works approval feedback, science and research procedures etc).
- Define a strategic community and stakeholder engagement plan for the whole of EPA.
- Develop an evaluation framework for defining and measuring engagement success and implement.
- Best practice engagement indicators embedded within individual performance plans and unit plans.
- Harmonise our engagement approach with other Victorian government agencies, other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth.
- A statutory peer review system established to formally review engagement plans based around the peer review process.

### PROVIDING USEFUL INFORMATION

Providing consistent, unambiguous, honest, timely and accessible information in response to community and stakeholder needs. Strategic initiatives

- Evaluation of current written material to assess usefulness and relevancy for community.
  - Update information bulletins, web content and brochures to ensure more user-friendly and relevant information.
-



## HOW WILL WE KNOW WE ARE SUCCESSFUL IN COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT?

- EPA is a trusted, reliable and accessible source of information.
- Industries are proactively engaging with the communities and stakeholders that they impact on.
- Communities have influence over the issues that they care about and that affect their lives.
- Community engagement 'EPA-style' is embedded in everything we do.
- There is respect and recognition of different opinions, approaches, cultures and needs.

## WHY SHOULD WE CONTINUE TO IMPROVE OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS?

By improving the way we work with stakeholders and community members there are several benefits for EPA:

- Greater acceptance, recognition, respect and trust for EPA and its work.
- Greater job satisfaction.
- Problems can be shared and solved collectively.
- Reduced misconceptions and misinformation
- Issues that may not otherwise have been considered are identified, leading to more robust solutions.
- Greater ownership of, and commitment to, outcomes by all.
- More resilient relationships between parties leads to support through the tougher times.

### THERE ARE ALSO BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS. SOME OF THESE ARE:

- Greater acceptance, respect and recognition of their needs.
- More efficient systems that make their lives better.
- Reduced animosity and more collaboration to meet dual outcomes.
- More trust of government and government processes.
- Increased understanding of the issues and dilemmas around the environment.
- Increased ownership of solutions to problems.

---

# A planning process for community engagement

This process helps you think through the steps for the development of a community engagement plan. Each step provides a series of important questions to answer before moving on. For further information please contact your local EPA Community Relations Officer or our Community Support Unit.

## 1. IDENTIFY THE DILEMMA/OPPORTUNITY

What is the dilemma/opportunity? Why do you want to involve the public, community and/or stakeholders?

## 2. IDENTIFY THE PEOPLE IN THE 'COMMUNITY'

Who do you need to talk to? Who's demanding to be let in? Whose input do you need? Who is legitimately part of this discussion? Whose interests are affected (positively/negatively) by this issue/problem/project? Who will be outraged later if excluded now? Whose buy-in do you need?

## 3. ANALYSE THE COMMUNITY'S GOALS AND CONSTRAINTS

What do the stakeholders/community want from the process? What possible benefits and costs are posed to them by your activities? What possible benefits and costs are posed to them by participating in your engagement program? How much power do they currently have to influence the outcome/decision? How much would they like to have? How would they like to be engaged? What type of engagement might the community be expecting? (Some social research can help here.)

## 4. ANALYSE YOUR GOALS AND CONSTRAINTS

What are you hoping to get from the community in order to achieve your goals? What does success look like? What does failure look like? What are you allowed to do or not do? What is forbidden/compulsory/non-negotiable? What decisions are predetermined? What is negotiable/flexible/open for debate? What's your mandate/role, budget and timelines? How would you like the community to be engaged? What type of engagement is your organisation expecting?

## 5. DETERMINE THE 'TENSIONS AND SYNERGIES'

Based on all of the above information, what is worth discussing? What goals might the community have that you can meet? What goals might you have that they can meet? Where is discussion likely to prove fruitful and where isn't it? How aligned are the engagement expectations?

## 6. DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE, PROCESS AND TOOLS

Based on all of the above, what is your overall engagement purpose with this project/issue (refer to IAP2 Model insert)? How might different people/stakeholders be engaged differently? What tools are appropriate for this project?

## 7. OUTLINE HOW RISKS WILL BE MANAGED

Based on the above analysis, what are the risks if you *don't* engage with the community/stakeholders? What are the risks if you *do* engage with the community/stakeholders? What is the likelihood of these risks occurring? What would be the impact if they did occur? How will these risks be managed?

## 8. OUTLINE HOW SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED

What is the purpose of the evaluation? Who wants to know what from the evaluation? What evidence will be collected and how? When will this reflection occur and what resources are required to do it?

## 9. OUTLINE YOUR LEARNING APPROACH

What do you want to learn about community engagement? What skills in community engagement do you want to build? What approach will you use to develop your skills? When and how will this happen? How can you help others learn from your experience?

## 10. WRITE UP YOUR PLAN AND IMPLEMENT IT

Get buy-in internally and externally when you write up the plan. Evaluate and revise as you go along. Remember it is a living document, not an archive.

For further information please email [community.engagement@epa.vic.gov.au](mailto:community.engagement@epa.vic.gov.au) or go to [www.epa.vic.gov.au/about\\_us/community\\_engagement](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about_us/community_engagement).