

## GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEES

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Key actions to ensure the effectiveness of a Community Liaison Committee (CLC) include a commitment by the project proponent/facility operator to make sure that the consultation process developed is transparent and inclusive. Effective CLCs also have clear aims and objectives and regularly review their progress.

Past EPA experience has shown that CLC approaches have been very successful if they have been well managed. Proponents, facility operators and affected communities have been able to develop collaborative approaches to solve problems and potential issues of concern.

These guidelines draw on EPA's experience to highlight key areas to consider in establishing and running CLCs.

They are particularly relevant for project proponents, facility operators and people in the community who may be considering developing or becoming involved with a community consultation program.

### COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEES

Some projects have the potential to generate significant community interest. If this is the case, project proponents should think about the best way to engage people who may have an interest or be potentially affected. To ignore community views can

affect a project's viability. In some circumstances this has led to particular projects being abandoned.

Existing facility operators may also benefit from developing a community consultation program, particularly if the facility operations attract community interest.

Dealing with community dissatisfaction can take a lot of management time and effort, affecting the productivity of an organisation. It can also affect the organisation's public image.

Community liaison committees offer an opportunity to consult and engage the community. Such committees act as useful reference points for the project proponents and facility operators involved with scoping, planning and implementing activities.

### ROLE OF COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEES

A CLC oversees the planning and development of a project as well as providing an avenue for regular community participation in monitoring its implementation.

A CLC can also have a valuable role in monitoring and reviewing the performance of existing facilities. Such a forum can be particularly useful for facilities wanting to develop an environment improvement plan (EIP) as a means of promoting continuous environment improvement.

## GETTING STARTED AND WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED

### The community

There are a variety of ways to contact people in the community who might want to be involved in the CLC. The size and scale of the project/operation and its potential impacts will usually influence the degree of effort required, and who or what groups or organisations in the community might want or need to be involved.

Some effective contact strategies include:

- letter box drops;
- door knocking;
- advertising in local papers;
- checking out what local community groups might operate in a particular area and seeking their views on the project/facility; or
- community meetings.

If community interest is low it may be more appropriate to use other means of informing the community other than establishing a CLC. Where this is the case options may include:

- an open day at the facility or the project site;
- holding periodic community information meetings;
- a dedicated telephone line and contact person for recording community concerns/feedback;
- advertising the commencement of key stages of the project in local newspapers and inviting comment; or

- regularly publishing progress reports on the project or facility operations in the local papers or for distribution in the local area.

Undertaking a thorough assessment of potential community interest should assist when deciding on the best option(s) to choose.

### Engaging others

In addition to involving individual members of the community it is important that organisations with an interest in the project or facility operations are also invited to participate in the consultation process. Such organisations may include:

- the local council;
- government agencies;
- business neighbours; or
- other community interest groups and non-government organisations.

The assessment of potential community interest should also provide an indication about possible groups or organisations to approach.

## THE COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE

A workable size for a CLC is 10 to 12 members, ideally including:

- five to six community representatives;
- two to three proponent/facility representatives;
- government representatives (local and State, whichever is relevant); and
- two to three representatives of other interested groups.

When there is greater interest from the community, the committee numbers can be increased to compensate for the common occurrence of a membership reduction over time. If participation is dropping off, it may be necessary to restart or re-initiate some of the contact strategies discussed previously.

Community representation on the CLC should ideally reflect the demographic of the community in which the project is being developed.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

### **Proponent or facility representatives**

Both senior staff and those involved in the project or facility operation should be represented on the CLC. This demonstrates a proponent's or operator's commitment to the consultation process and provides assurance to the community that their issues are being heard by people at all levels in the organisation.

The role of proponent/operator representatives is to inform the CLC of the project/operation plans and to provide ongoing feedback to the CLC on project progress. Contentious and technical issues may also need to be discussed to assist community understanding of the project/operation. Ultimately this promotes more informed debate about project and operational issues and can lead to better solutions to problems identified.

It is also desirable that the proponent/facility operator has a person specifically assigned to be a

contact for community inquiries. This provides consistency of communications and will also assist in dealing with emerging issues in a more timely way.

### **Community members**

Community members can assist in the project's development from the outset. This generally involves asking questions about the project, identifying areas of concern, suggesting strategies for improvements and providing constructive feedback on the proponent's suggestions for improvements. In the case of existing facilities, local residents can provide valuable information and feedback about the facility's impacts in the surrounding community.

### **Government representatives**

Government representatives can provide technical advice and information on regulatory requirements, depending upon the type of project. They can also assist in the initial process of developing the CLC and may chair meetings, particularly if there is conflict between some members of the CLC.

### **Interest group and non-government organisation (NGO) representatives**

A CLC might also include representatives of interest groups and NGO representatives if the project has more regional or widespread implications.

Where there is sufficient community interest about an existing facility, organised community groups may have been formed and in that case it would be important to involve representatives from such groups.

## COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETINGS

### Starting out

People need to find out what the project/operation is about and have an opportunity to exchange views. The first meeting should be used to help determine what the purpose of the CLC should be. For example, the CLC may monitor the development and implementation of an EIP or be a reference point for the implementation and monitoring of a project.

These first few meetings can sometimes involve conflict, particularly if there is some community resistance to the project or if there have been long-standing problems with an existing facility.

If there are problems, people are likely to come to the first meeting with little reason to trust. EPA experience suggests however, that people are likely to welcome the initiative shown by the proponent or facility operator in wanting to consult. Over time it is likely that people will be more willing to play a constructive role in the consultation process when such goodwill is shown.

At these initial meetings, particularly if there are participants who have not been involved in a CLC before, it may be beneficial to invite a community member with previous or current CLC experience to provide an overview of the CLC process, what to expect, problems encountered and the results obtained. Alternatively a government representative, or another individual with consultation experience, may be able to provide some insight into how the process has worked in other situations.

### Making meetings effective

CLC meetings should be open forums, providing members of the community with an opportunity to raise any issues of concern. The following are some key behaviours and actions to consider:

- avoid using technical jargon at all times, particularly when discussing complex issues;
- provide a site tour;
- be willing to be open to scrutiny;
- be open and honest;
- be prepared to listen to community concerns;
- acknowledge people's perceptions and views – it does not mean you agree with them; and
- inform the community of any proposed changes or developments as soon as is possible.

## MEETING PROCESS AND RESOURCING ISSUES

### Resourcing the CLC

Once the CLC's purpose is established, this will help determine what resources might be required for the CLC to do its work.

If the purpose of a CLC is to oversee the development of an EIP, for example, it may be necessary at some stages of the process to form sub-groups to work on specific issues in a more intensive way.

### **Working out meeting procedures**

Meeting procedures and ground rules should also be negotiated. This usually involves making decisions such as who will chair meetings, who will take minutes, what information will be recorded, where meetings will be held, clarifying roles and responsibilities of participants, dealing with disputes and defining the order of proceedings. Decision making procedures should also be discussed.

CLC participants would usually decide on whom would take responsibility for meeting administration including circulation of agendas and minutes of the meeting as well as providing refreshments and any other administrative support the CLC may require. Usually the project proponent/facility operator takes on this responsibility however other participants in the CLC may also assume this role. The important thing is that the CLC negotiates how this will occur.

### **FREQUENCY OF COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

In the early stages of consultation the CLC should meet approximately every four weeks at a time suitable to all participants.

Having an agreed time limit for meetings is important. Ideally meetings should go for no more than two hours to make the best use of the time available, recognising that some participants are volunteering their time to attend. Issues that have not been fully debated should be put on the agenda for subsequent meetings.

If a CLC meets as various aspects of a specific project are completed, quarterly, six-monthly or even annual meetings may be sufficient.

If the CLC is meeting about a facility's operations or assisting with the development of an EIP, then monthly or quarterly meetings could be more appropriate.

Whatever option is selected, the CLC members should agree on the meeting schedule.

### **TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT THE COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE'S WORK**

#### **External communications**

It is important to recognise that not all members of the community will want to be directly involved in a CLC. Also, the views of community members involved with the CLC may not necessarily represent those of the entire community. Some community members may be happy to report back to other people or groups not directly involved with the committee but it should not be an expectation placed on community members of the CLC. The CLC should ideally determine the best ways to keep the wider community aware of its activities.

This can be achieved through various means including:

- the regular circulation of a newsletter in the local community;
- developing a web site;
- inclusion of information in local newspapers;
- open days; and

- distributing leaflets about the CLC's activities.

With specific projects some proponents/facility managers have held periodic open days. In some instances a public launch has been held once the project has been completed. This can be an important way of recognising the efforts of all those involved in the project.

### **Internal communications**

It is important not to overlook communicating with facility or project staff about the CLC's activities. Staff newsletters or bulletins can be an effective way of promoting the CLC's work to those people not directly involved with the CLC.

## **MONITORING PROGRESS OF THE COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE**

### **Evaluation and review**

A CLC needs to regularly review its role and progress. Priorities and interests will change over time and it is important to undertake regular 'reality checks' with CLC members to ensure the CLC is on track to meet its aims and objectives. Reviews may be undertaken by the CLC itself or by a person independent of the CLC. Ideally, the CLC members should discuss the best way of doing this when the committee first forms.

### **Membership**

For the CLC to remain effective it is important to ensure that the CLC's membership always reflects the range of different community interests and perspectives.

## **RELATED EPA PUBLICATION**

### **Community involvement**

*Ten Steps to Successful Community/Industry Consultation* (EPA Publication 520)

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