

Working & Engaging with Community Groups: Barriers & Boundaries

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Engage early

Numerous reasons for failing to do so:

- Lack of preparedness – planning, staff, resources
- Lack of respect for community knowledge – we 'know' what we need
- Focus on "getting the job done" - results
- Fear of conflict



What perspectives do we bring?

- Research scientist
- Community advocate
- Local Government
- State or Federal agency
- Someone else



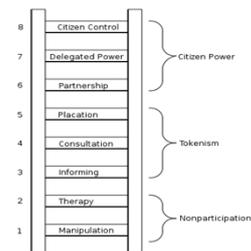
Openness to new ideas

- many heads are wiser than one

Why are we engaging with the community?

Do we/they know the 'boundaries'?

Arnstein's ladder of public participation



Barriers to effective engagement

- Failing to involve community early
- Lacking openness to new ideas
- Avoiding, rather than acknowledging 'conflict'
- Leaving out different types of knowledge



Acknowledging conflict and addressing it constructively

When faced with conflict in a group:

- Recognise different personal strategies (Avoiding, Smoothing, Forcing, Compromising)
- Establish rules for proper discussion
- Develop respectful responses to disrespectful behavior
- Stick to issues and behaviors, not personalities or people
- Maintain focus on 'We can work this out'
- Count to 10. Use silence to increase calm and cool the air
- Give people a way out. Establish choices.
- Refuse the win-lose perspective



Recognising different types of knowledge

Brown VA, Harris J & Russell JY (2010)

INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE
Own lived experience, lifestyle choices, learning style, identity
Content: reflections, learning

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
Shared lived experience of individuals, families, businesses, communities
Content: stories, events, histories

SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE
Environment and Health Sciences, Engineering, Law, Philosophy, etc
Content: case studies, experiments

ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
Organisational governance, policy, strategies
Content: agendas, alliances, plans

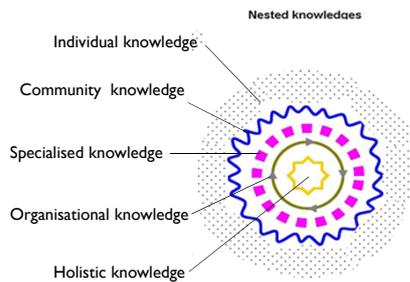
HOLISTIC KNOWLEDGE
Core of the matter, vision of the future, a common purpose
Content: symbol, vision, ideal

- A popular harbourside swimming enclosure
- Rapid siltation from unknown causes – much speculation
- Swimmers want it dredged
- Boat users fear dredging will affect nearby marina access
- Fishers & local environmentalists fear Harbour pollution from dredging

All expect Council to 'fix the problem' BUT...



Collective knowledge



- Costs would be considerable
- Council is not the consent authority
- Results unlikely to be lasting

WHAT TO DO?



Case study: Harbourside pool siltation



Council:

- Involved
 - The local community precinct participants
 - Other community users (on-site consultative session)
 - Relevant State agencies
- Shared possible solutions – shared understanding of challenges
- Sought external funding to support dredging, approved with numerous environmental conditions



Conclusions

The outcomes are not always positive
The pathway is rarely easy

BUT...

Worth investing in community engagement

- Planning from the outset
- Involving the community & those with other types of knowledge, early
- Being clear about the purpose of the engagement
- Being ready to address conflict constructively

