

Build community engagement, celebrate milestones and tell your story

**Ara
Ake**

Future
Energy
Development



Build community engagement, celebrate milestones and tell your story

The community for a Community Energy Project (CEP) comprises not only those living in close geographic proximity but also individuals who have a specific interest in the project, even if they reside further away. The boundaries of the local geographic community will be specific to each project.

Engaging the community in a CEP should begin early and be sustained over time. The goal is to create enthusiasm, a sense of ownership, and foster participation in decision-making processes. Building relationships and increasing knowledge within the community is crucial, as many may have limited experience in community energy projects.

Effective community engagement goes beyond simple communication; it aims to create valued relationships and a sense of community ownership. Contact points with the community should be carefully considered, and local organisations and institutions should be involved in engagement plans to reach different segments of the community effectively.

Since community energy projects involve legal, financial, and operational aspects, it is important to ensure that community members understand these elements. Building knowledge and trust through education and clear communication is essential, as many individuals may be unfamiliar with this field.

Trust is a critical component in community energy projects. It is developed through consistency, delivering on expectations, and ensuring that processes and outcomes are understood, agreed upon, and perceived as fair. Community support must be earned, actively maintained, and continually evaluated.

Community engagement means participation.

Community engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and its implementation can vary significantly depending on the project, context, and stakeholders involved. It is



important to recognise that community engagement is an ongoing process that occurs throughout the entire lifespan of a project, rather than a one-time event.

Meaningful participation involves involving people in various ways and to different degrees based on their interests, expertise, and needs. It goes beyond simply informing or consulting the community and aims to empower them to actively shape the processes and outcomes of the project.

Community engagement provides opportunities for communities and stakeholders to have a voice, express their concerns, provide feedback, and contribute their ideas and expertise. It helps build trust, transparency, and collaborative relationships between project organisers and the community.

By creating diverse engagement options, such as public meetings, workshops, focus

groups, online platforms, or community-led initiatives, different individuals and groups within the community can participate according to their preferences and availability. This allows for a broader representation of perspectives and ensures that local people have the opportunity to actively contribute and influence the project.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)¹ provides a framework (modified in Table 1 below from the Tasmanian Government's Renewable energy Action Plan²). This framework is to help community groups to understand the different levels of engagement. The spectrum ranges from simply informing the public to empowering them in the decision-making process. To use this resource, the International Association for Public Participation requests community groups seek their permission first but have said that not-for-profit community organisation or educational institutions, the fee will be waived (no fees).³

Table 1: A spectrum of approaches to community engagement

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Community engagement objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide balanced and objective information. • Assist community in understanding all aspects of the project, including possible problems / issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain feedback from the community on plans, options and/or decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with community throughout the process and all stages of the project • Ensure community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with community in each aspect of planning, development and decision making, including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the community to lead the development of the renewable energy project. • Placing decision making in the hands of the community
Promises to community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep the community informed through all stages of development, including issues and delays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To keep the community informed. • Listen and acknowledge suggestions and concerns. • Provide feedback on how input influenced the decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with community to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed. • Provide feedback on how input influenced the decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to the community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions. • Incorporate advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To implement what the community decides.

1 [Your Peak Body for Engagement | IAP2 Australasia](#)

2 [Technical_Supplement_2_-_Plan_Community_Engagement.pdf](#)

3 [Guidelines for Use of IAP2 Copyright Protected Materials - International Association for Public Participation](#)



Community Engagement plan

A Community Engagement Plan is a crucial tool for effectively involving the community in a project and ensuring their meaningful participation. Here are some key components that a Community Engagement Plan typically includes:

- **Objectives and Principles:** Clearly state the objectives of the engagement plan and the guiding principles that will shape the process. This may include principles such as transparency, inclusivity, respect for diverse perspectives, and empowerment of the community.
- **Target Audience:** Identify the specific stakeholders and communities that will be engaged throughout the project. This may include local residents, community organisations, businesses, indigenous groups, and other relevant stakeholders.
- **Engagement Methods:** Outline the various methods and techniques that will be employed to engage with the community. This can include public meetings, workshops, focus groups, surveys, online platforms, community-led initiatives, or other creative approaches. Consider the appropriate timing and frequency of each method.
- **Timelines and Phases:** Provide a timeline that outlines when each engagement activity will occur throughout the project's lifecycle. This ensures that engagement is integrated into different phases, from initial planning to implementation and ongoing monitoring.
- **Communication and Information Sharing:** Describe how project information will be communicated to the community. This may include regular updates, newsletters, project websites, social media channels, or other communication tools. Ensure that information is presented in a clear and accessible manner.
- **Issue Resolution:** Establish a process for addressing issues, concerns, and complaints raised by the community. Outline how these will be documented, responded to, and resolved in a timely manner. This helps maintain transparency and accountability.
- **Evaluation and Feedback:** Outline how the effectiveness of the engagement process will be evaluated. This may involve collecting feedback from participants, conducting surveys or interviews, or utilising other evaluation methods. Use this feedback to make improvements and adjust the engagement strategy as needed.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the project team, community representatives, and any external partners involved in the engagement process. This helps ensure that everyone understands their roles and facilitates effective coordination.
- **Budget and Resources:** Allocate the necessary resources, including budget and staff, to support the community engagement activities. This ensures that adequate support is available to implement the engagement plan effectively.

Celebrating milestones and telling your story

Celebrating milestones

Ceremonies and celebrations play a significant role in project engagement and can have a profound impact on community motivation and inspiration. Recognising and celebrating small wins along the way not only acknowledges the progress made but also reinforces the sense of achievement and momentum. Additionally, these celebrations can attract new individuals to join the project, fostering a sense of community and inclusiveness.

Within the context of Māori tikanga, a pre-dawn blessing ceremony at the commencement of projects is a customary practice. This ceremony holds deep cultural significance and serves to acknowledge the spiritual and ancestral connections to the land and the project. It sets a positive and respectful tone for the project's initiation and symbolises the collective support and blessings of the community.

The start of construction and the commissioning of a community energy project are significant milestones that deserve celebration. These moments mark important progress and achievements in the project's development, and they provide valuable opportunities to engage and involve the community.

Start of Construction:

The commencement of construction is a milestone worth celebrating as it signifies that the project is transitioning from the planning and preparation phase to the active implementation phase. It represents the culmination of significant efforts, such as securing funding, finalising contracts, and overcoming various challenges. Celebrating this milestone can bring the community together, generate excitement, and create a sense of shared accomplishment. It is also an excellent occasion to involve local hapu to perform blessings or ceremonies that honour the project and its connection to the land and community.

Flicking the Big Switch:

Once construction is complete, and the necessary checks and tests have been performed, the project is commissioned, and power can start flowing. This moment symbolises the successful completion of the project and the transition to the operational phase. It is a time for celebration and reflection on the goals and aspirations that inspired the project. It is also an opportunity to engage the community in ongoing conversations about energy, sustainability, and the project's impact. By involving the community in this milestone, you can reinforce their connection to the project and ensure that the goals set out initially have been met or exceeded.

Why telling your story is an important part of your CEP

Telling your story is an essential part of a Community Engagement Plan (CEP) for several reasons:

Gathering Support:

Storytelling is a powerful tool to generate support for your project. By crafting and sharing a compelling narrative, you can captivate the interest and emotions of your audience, including community members, potential funders, stakeholders, and policymakers. Sharing your project's story early and consistently helps build momentum and create a positive perception of your project's values, goals, and impact.

Influence on Funding:

While numbers and data are important for funding considerations, storytelling plays a complementary role. Funders are often influenced by narratives that align with their own values and inspire them. A well-told story can help funders connect with your project on a deeper level, increasing their likelihood of investing in your initiative and working closely with you to ensure its success.

Sustaining Community Support:

Community energy projects often span extended periods, and it's common for interest and support to wane as the realities and challenges of the project become apparent. Storytelling helps keep the community and supporters engaged and connected throughout the project's lifecycle. Sharing updates, progress, and milestones through various mediums, such as articles, videos, social media, and newsletters, allows individuals to stay informed, maintain a sense of involvement, and continue supporting the project when needed.

Inspiring Others and Knowledge Sharing:

Your project's story can inspire others to embark on their own community energy projects. By sharing your experiences, challenges, and successful strategies, you contribute to the collective knowledge of the community energy sector. This knowledge sharing not only helps others learn from your project but also fosters collaboration and accelerates the growth of sustainable energy initiatives.

By recognising the importance of storytelling and incorporating it as an integral part of your CEP, you can effectively engage stakeholders, build support, and create a lasting impact beyond your project's boundaries.



**Ara
Ake**

Future
Energy
Development

Address: 8 Young Street, New Plymouth 4310

Email: info@araake.co.nz

www.araake.co.nz