

Scope

This policy applies to community engagement led by Equis Australia (“Equis”).

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement refers to the processes by which Equis interacts with the communities in which we operate, or aim to operate, to guide the development of Equis’ energy projects.

Purpose

This policy provides a framework to guide a consistent, transparent, and effective approach to community engagement.

The policy is underpinned by the following engagement aims:

- to ensure Equis has a clear purpose and process for engagement;
- to create a consistent and best practice approach;
- to understand how community members want to be engaged, and to communicate how they may engage and how their feedback will be used in decision-making;
- to ensure participation of diverse, disengaged and marginalised sectors; and
- to embed governance, evaluation and monitoring processes for compliance.

Policy statement

Equis is committed to driving a culture of excellence in engagement with our stakeholders. Our engagement activities will be genuine, inclusive, fit-for-purpose and transparent. Equis will provide a range of engagement platforms that encourage a broader, more inclusive engagement which aims to achieve relevant and responsive outcomes.

To promote social inclusion, Equis’ community engagement strategies will create genuine connections with our diverse communities that provide disengaged and disadvantaged stakeholders opportunities to share information, contribute feedback and provide input into the decisions that affect them.

We recognise that every project, service or program that the community is consulted on will have its own unique characteristics, so we will take a tailored approach. As an organisation that champions best practice, Equis will review and evaluate its community engagement practices on a regular basis.

Guiding principles

Equis’ community engagement practices will be based on the following principles, where engagement is:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inclusive | To the extent possible, a range of opportunities and techniques is used to encourage input and address barriers to participation in community engagement. |
| Well-planned | The planning of community engagement activities is proactive, tailored and coordinated to ensure timely and effective outcomes are achieved. |

Collaborative	Collaboration and partnerships are explored and, where appropriate, initiated to assist in delivering better community engagement outcomes and to share skills and knowledge to facilitate ongoing learning and improvement.
Transparent	Community engagement activities are open and clear. Equis will carefully consider and accurately represent the community's role and scope for influence in the decision-making process and inform the community how their input has influenced decisions or outcomes.

Our approach

We know why we are engaging, and we communicate this clearly.

We engage early to identify challenges and community-driven solutions.

We encourage contribution of local knowledge and input, so the engagement remains relevant and purposeful.

We are sensitive to history and know the context.

We are inclusive and connect with as many people as we can, including those hardest to reach.

We genuinely inform and listen at every stage.

Where possible, we formulate strategies and solutions together with communities.

We will share our success with our host community.

We will provide the communications tools to ensure the community is aware of, and has the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in, two-way community engagement activities.

We are committed to creating genuine connections with our host communities so, where possible, they can drive the decisions that affect them, leading to more robust decision making that reflects their needs, priorities, and expectations.

Our engagement is delivered by:

- people who are skilled listeners, negotiators, and enablers;

- processes that provide for adequate timeframes and negotiated milestones;
- systems with good feedback loops;
- structures that are accessible; and
- a collaborative culture where communities are recognised as participants and welcomed as partners.

We aim to demonstrate the core values of the [International Association for Public Participation, \(IAP2\) Public Participation Spectrum](#), where public participation:

- is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process;
- includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision;
- promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers;
- facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
- seeks input from participants in designing how they participate;
- provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; and
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Our process

A tailored engagement plan will be created using the steps in the Engagement Wheel below, which sets out an approach that can be adapted to the requirements of projects and individual issues.



When we engage

We engage community and stakeholders throughout the entire project life cycle (right).

As noted above, our community engagement approach is guided by the IAP2 framework for community engagement.

We will apply the IAP2 framework (Figure 2 below) appropriately based on the activity and context of each project.

We will also introduce new and innovative strategies (over and above this) to communicate and engage in a way that responds to the diversity of each project and community.

Figure 1 - Our stages of community Engagement



Source: Dept of NRME

Increasing level of public impact

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems alternatives and solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
Example tools	Fact Sheets Websites Open Houses	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen advisory committees Consensus building Participatory decision - making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions

How we engage

Equis has a clear process for designing and delivering community engagement. Our community engagement will have clearly identified objectives and scope. We will identify the key decisions to be made, the negotiables and non-negotiables, the purpose and objectives for the engagement and the level of influence available. These will be clearly communicated to the community and stakeholders to ensure that they are understood. Our engagement process will be proportionate and fit for purpose, aligned to the scope and complexity of the project and process. The communication channels and engagement methods we use will be suitable to the purpose and to the needs of the community.

This process has six key stages as shown in the figure below.

1. Define

Clearly Define the decision required, and the scope of the public participation exercise

2. Identify

Understand who is affected and how they should be included

3. Understand

Identify the resources, skills and time required for effective participation

4. Document

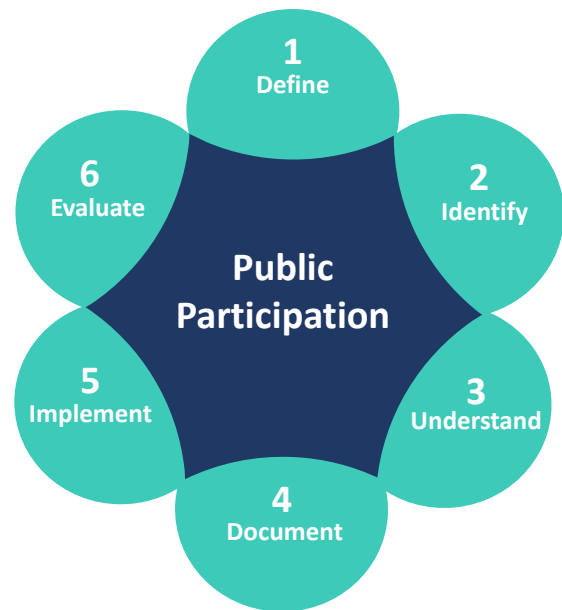
Document the public participation and management approach

5. Implement

Implement the public participation plan and monitor its progress

6. Evaluate

Evaluate the public participation exercise and apply continuous improvement



Source: www.audit.vic.gov.au

Who we engage

The engagement project leader (and project teams) need to assess who the key people are in each project and how they wish to be engaged. These mainly include but are not limited to:

- key organisational partners, stakeholders and investors;
- advocacy leaders;
- leaders in the communities, organisations and groups being engaged;
- internal project teams;
- federal, state and local government leaders; and
- all community stakeholders who are impacted by the project, or can influence the project.

Why we engage



Share information	<p>To share information with our stakeholders and the public about our projects, providing opportunity to engage using various platforms that ensure equitable and timely access to information.</p> <p>To work with stakeholder and community feedback that will enable us to make more informed decisions and deliver better outcomes to our communities.</p>
Understand reactions	To understand the views of our stakeholders and host communities, and to understand any implications and impacts of a project on them.
Problem solve and improve proposals	To define and, where possible, create potential solutions with the community and stakeholders.
Build relationships	To foster stronger relationships with our communities and stakeholders by creating new relationships with them and strengthening existing ones. This will help us better understand the needs and priorities of our diverse communities and create better public value.
Generate support	To create understanding of our projects, through genuine and meaningful conversations in order to build trust, gain support for our projects and earn a social licence to operate.
Identify problems and opportunities	To highlight how our projects create responsive opportunities to existing problems.
Reputational risk	To reduce any reputational risks by working with, educating, and responding to community concern in a timely and effective manner.
Comply with the law	Projects that exceed a certain value require community engagement and community development (through social procurement and community benefit initiatives). Effective community engagement and community development are conditions of planning approval.

Communication channels and engagement methods

Effective and meaningful community engagement will be central to Equis establishing and maintaining a social licence.

To promote inclusive engagement opportunities for all sectors, Equis will use a range of engagement platforms and methods. These may include face to face meetings, online engagement, community consultations and print media. We will work with the community to identify how each community sector wishes to be engaged.

The selection of these channels and methods will be fit for purpose considering the complexities of each project and the level of engagement required.

Community and project specific communication plans will be tailored to the needs of the communities and stakeholders to be engaged.

- Mailed letters and flyers
- Online meetings
- In-person meetings
- Public meetings
- Website
- Online engagement platform
- Telephone conversations
- Emails
- Forums
- Drop-in sessions
- Media and social media (Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Signage
- Advertising in local newspapers
- Surveys and polls
- Workshops
- Citizen advisory committees

Roles and responsibilities

Implementation of this policy is a whole-of-Equis responsibility. Specific roles and responsibilities are listed below.

All of Equis Team

Equis managing directors, directors and staff are responsible for advocating for quality community engagement activities and considering community feedback when making decisions. Management will be encouraged to attend community engagement events and activities to observe and listen to community feedback.

Community Engagement Team

Equis' Community Engagement managers are responsible for having a robust understanding of, and implementing, maintaining and continuously improving, Equis' Community Engagement Framework (policies, strategies and plans). The Community Engagement team is responsible for providing guidance and reporting to management about community engagement principles, processes, resources and reporting. The Community Engagement team is also responsible for monitoring community engagement processes and building community engagement skills and capabilities across the organisation.

Evaluation

We will continuously monitor and review our community engagement processes and activities. The community will be encouraged to participate in our online surveys to evaluate our engagement performance.

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of Equis' community engagement, please refer to our Complaints Policy, available [here](#).

Definitions

accessibility	Identifying and eliminating obstacles and barriers to ensure anyone can access the engagement process, services, information and use places, regardless of their ability, location, culture, time or other differentiating factors.
community	A group of people, the members of which reside in the same geographical areas or have a shared background, interest, affiliation or membership. People can belong to several communities at any one time.
community engagement	An intentional process with the specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions of the members of the community, stakeholders or organization in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome (IAP2, 2022). A process by which community and Equis work together to facilitate community input into project and benefit sharing decision-making.
community engagement framework	The suite of Equis documents which outlines Equis' vision and commitment to engaging with the community, detail the community engagement roles and responsibilities across Equis and the various community engagement processes, tools and resources. These could include policies, strategies, plans.
diverse communities	Refers to the different communities that exist within the region, including those with a common interest or can refer to people who share something in common, such as gender, abilities, religion and cultural background.
stakeholders	Defined as individuals, groups, organisations, investors or political entities who are interested, invested or impacted by the project outcomes and decisions. They are also key persons who can influence project outcomes and decisions.
IAP2	The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organization dedicated to advancing the practice of public participation.

Supporting documents

This **Community Engagement Policy** is supported by policies and procedures set out in the following documents:

- (i) **Complaints Policy** (public document); and
- (ii) **Community Engagement Communications Guidelines** (Equis internal document).

Document management

Endorsement date	June 2022
Last reviewed and approved	September 2024
Current version	2
Review cycle	Annual
Next review date	September 2025
Responsible department	Legal and Compliance (Australia)
Relevant legislation, standards and policies	Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) ISO 10002:2018, AS 10002:2022 IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard in Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Equis aims to build and maintain respectful and collaborative relationships with the communities in which we operate. The communities that host us are at the heart of what we do and we recognise that community support is critical to our project success. We are committed to building long-term, socially responsive, harmonious partnerships that foster mutual respect through meaningful community engagement and benefit sharing initiatives that drive long-term investment in the regions and the communities that host our projects.