

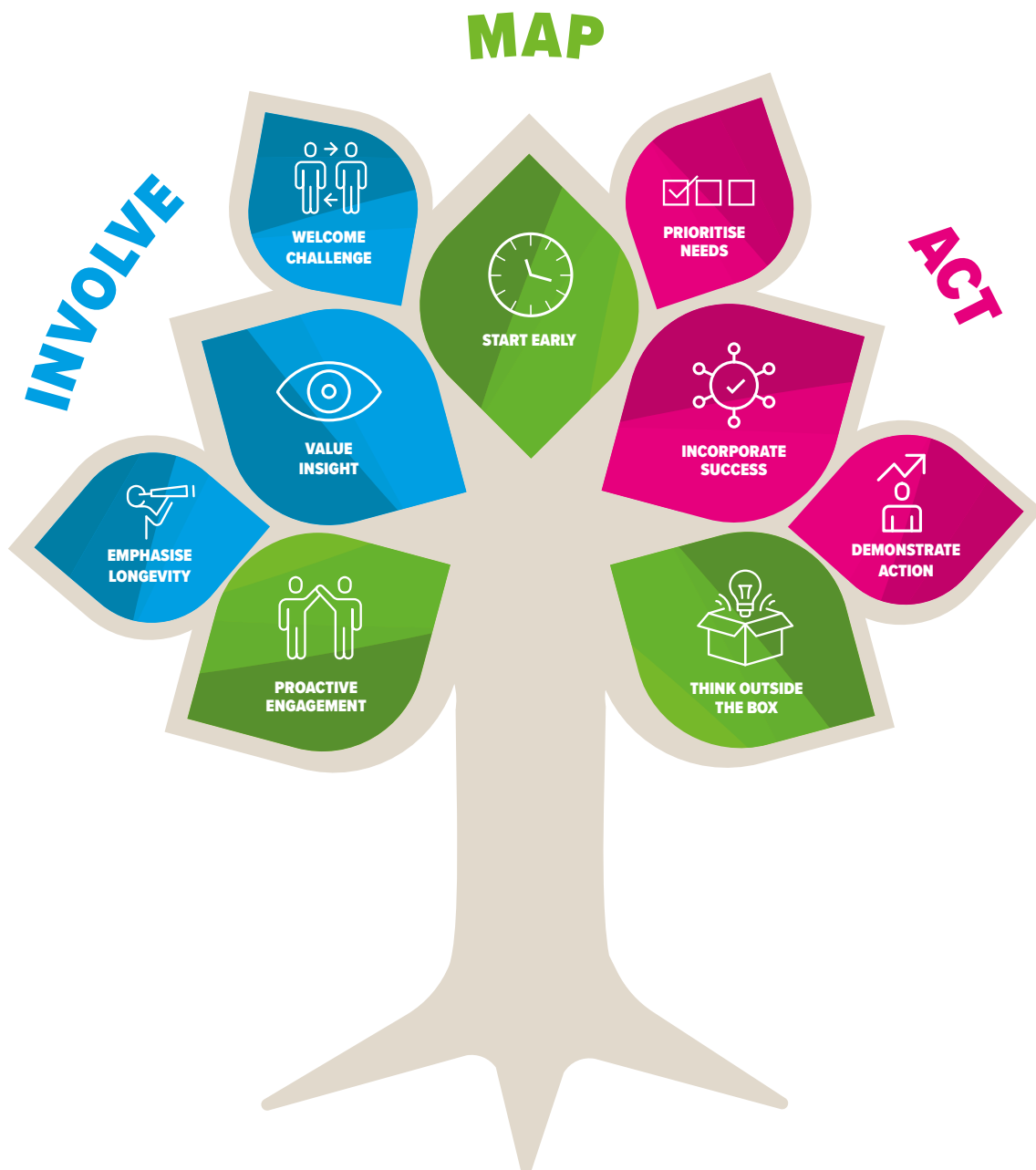


The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network

ROUTEMAP

INVOLVING DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS IN CLIMATE ACTION

A JUST TRANSITION TO A NET-ZERO, RESILIENT FUTURE



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SUPPORTED BY



INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Business in the Community (BITC) in partnership with its members, commissioned YouGov to carry out two nationally representative surveys to help understand public attitudes and awareness to the climate crisis and business action to address it.

A key finding of this research was that just 25% of people and 40% of businesses believed that the social benefits of the coming transition would be shared equally, with 14% of people and 27% of businesses expecting negative impacts to also be shared unfairly. Support for helping communities to minimise the risk of climate impacts was higher than average among Black and mixed ethnicity respondents¹. This highlights the importance of ensuring business action to address climate change, simultaneously supports a Just Transition, defined as 'ensuring a fair and inclusive journey to a net zero, resilient future where people and nature thrive'.

Businesses must create this future in partnership with stakeholders; creating economic opportunities and actively regenerating communities whilst ensuring that no section of society is left behind. In 2022, BITC published **The Right Climate For Business: leading a just transition** and initiated a series of innovation sprints to illustrate the challenge and develop solutions. This process featured input from academics, non-governmental organisations, government, and member companies. Based on the identified challenges that business faces in recognising and supporting their diverse stakeholders we have produced this routemap which we hope will be a valuable resource for businesses both beginning or already advanced in their climate strategy planning

HOW TO USE THIS ROUTEMAP

The diverse stakeholders routemap forms part of a series of resources and activities BITC has produced to support member businesses to lead a just transition. It supports businesses with the involve diverse stakeholders and support your community step of their just transition plan, following BITC's **Seven Steps for Climate Action**.

The routemap recognises that organisations will have different starting points and needs when it comes to engaging their diverse stakeholders. It's an interactive PDF, designed so you can click on the sections to move through **MAP**, **INVOLVE** and **ACT** in an order that matches your organisational priorities and where you are on your journey.

We suggest organisations starting out begin with **MAP**. Alternatively, you can read it as a normal document.

Use this routemap to develop your plan of action on diverse stakeholders and **sign up on our website** to show your commitment and track your progress.

For supporting research and the business case, see our **Right Climate for Business report** and **Involving Diverse Stakeholders for a Just Transition** factsheet.

SUPPORTED BY ROYAL LONDON

AT ROYAL LONDON, WE BELIEVE THAT DIFFERENCE IS A STRENGTH. A KALEIDOSCOPE OF PEOPLE AND PERSONALITIES GIVES US DIVERSITY OF SKILLS – EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND, ETHNICITY, PHYSICAL ABILITY OR DISABILITY, GENDER, AGE AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

INCLUSIVELY INCORPORATING THE VIEWS OF A DIVERSE SET OF STAKEHOLDERS WILL STRENGTHEN ANY STRATEGY WITH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ALL INVOLVED IN AN EQUITABLE MANNER.



CASE STUDY: Royal London

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-LED ENTERPRISE TO DRIVE A JUST TRANSITION

As a purpose-driven mutual Royal London is defined by the impact it wants to see, not only for its customers but for wider society. This is most prominent in the award-winning 'social value' Changemakers programme, launched since 2021. Royal London has invested £1.2m over 3 years to develop and invest in bold ideas and sustainable solutions from ambitious social enterprises in communities across the UK and Ireland. The programme champions an inclusive way to address pressing climate issues whilst supporting the financial resilience of diversely owned Small and medium-size enterprises (SME) and voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs).

In addition to Royal London playing its part by considering the impact of the transition on colleagues, customers, communities, the supply chain and ensuring robust governance, industry and policymaker engagement and advocacy to influence change. The Changemakers programme has enabled Royal London to empower communities to address local climate challenges and mitigate against negative societal impacts of transitioning to net zero in an equitable manner.

Changemakers (including Bristol Green Capital Partnership, Pocket Forests, Croydon Community energy, Community Retrofits Ireland, Remake Scotland, Circular11, Energise Sussex Coast and Lendology CIC)

also receive access to Royal London's professional expertise as part of the programme, by jointly inspiring mutually-beneficial relationships with employees offering tailored business support [pro-bono].

This support includes individual consultancy, learning sessions with other social entrepreneurs, and a grant of £10,000 - £30,000 to continue to grow their impact and income generation.

Sarah Pennells, Consumer Finance Specialist at Royal London explained the importance of the programme to their wider social mission:

'We believe that inspiring social enterprises can provide real solutions to issues of climate change and sustainability, with innovation at their heart. We are delighted to support communities who are looking at new ways to ensure that a just transition and moving fairly to a sustainable world is a possibility for everyone.'

The Changemakers have also reported on the impact of the programme;

'A huge impact on both advertising and spreading the word, enabling us to reach people that need help and link us with others in the community who can provide services, such as training for disadvantaged people... an opportunity to increase the impact of our Retrofit Services, with the aim of creating a model that can be replicated by community energy organisations across the country.'

WHY WORK WITH DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS?

The major industrial change that will accompany decarbonisation of the economy will disrupt many existing jobs, industries, and communities.

The transition to net zero and building resilience to the impacts of the climate crisis on production and distribution of goods and services will transform the economy and our lifestyles at an unprecedented speed and scale. Every business in every sector will be affected, with new skills required to serve new industries and many current jobs and commercial activities being phased out.

Actions to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are currently centred around efficiency measures, electrification, and actions to make commercial activity less energy intensive.

Once these initial efficiencies have been realised, further decarbonisation will require innovation in manufacturing processes and engagement with suppliers to ensure that emissions are removed throughout supply chains. Regulatory and investor pressure to have credible climate transition plans is growing and forward-looking businesses should seek to implement climate action plans, developed in collaboration with the employees, suppliers, and communities that the business supports.

The widely accepted definition of stakeholders is those individuals or groups who may or may not be able to change the course of a business or project, but who are affected in some way by its outcomes. This includes internal stakeholders such as business owners, executives and management, other employees, and clients, as well as external stakeholders such as customers suppliers, creditors, government, and wider communities².

The UK Companies Act 2006, Section 172 states that a business should act “to promote the success of the company for the benefit of its members” with the members (stakeholders) mentioned including employees, suppliers, customers and others, as well as the impact of operations on all of these in the longer term and on the community and the environment³.

The Financial Reporting Council find that investors expect companies reporting on their stakeholders to go beyond the section 172 definition and include future generations, lenders, governments and regulators, also re-evaluating over time which groups may be more or less relevant and which the business should take most care to avoid impacting⁴.

In this document consider all groups encompassed in the above definitions to be diverse stakeholders, particularly vulnerable or marginalised people. This can include the families and economic dependents of employees and suppliers as well as neighbours, civil society groups and others.

Our Seven Steps for Climate Action help businesses design and deliver just transition strategies.



WHY SHOULD BUSINESS CARE?

The risk of an industrial transition that leaves behind entire communities or groups is apparent, with several regions in the UK still serving as examples of what an unjust economic transformation can look like⁵. With government and business action on climate change driving the transformation to net zero, the lack of diversity of environment professionals raises concerns that the voices and lives of diverse groups will be excluded; where most sectors show an average of 12% of employees identifying as Black, Asian, Mixed Race and ethnically diverse, in the UK environmental sector, that figure stands at under 5%⁶. For context, recently published 2021 census data from the England and Wales census demonstrates an increase to 18.3% of people declaring they are Black, Asian, Mixed Race and ethnically diverse⁷.

Workforces containing gender and ethnic diversity have both been found to outperform less diverse equivalents⁸, with diverse companies enjoying innovation revenue that is 19% higher than their less diverse competitors⁹. With legislation such as the European Union (EU) Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and its UK equivalent already mandating stakeholder engagement to fully understand human rights, environmental and other risks within the value chain. Most businesses should already be prepared to identify stakeholder groups and seek their views. Likewise, those businesses who engage in public procurement will already be familiar with the social value requirements needed to evidence community integration¹⁰.

Engaging with more diverse voices should be of key importance to business for reasons that go beyond the moral or altruistic, for example:

- **RECRUITING AND RETAINING TALENT:** younger generations are demonstrating a preference for working in companies that are developing solutions and taking action to address social and environmental challenges¹¹. Research has shown that business-sponsored social programs not only aid such recruitment but make employees more engaged with their work as a result of this involvement¹².
 - **REPUTATION AND BRAND IMAGE:** evidence shows that a majority of the public wants businesses to act on both environmental and social issues, but are unaware of what businesses are actually doing, and do not trust them to act on what they say¹³.
- Furthermore, there is clear evidence to support the correlation between the quality of the relationship between the business and its stakeholders and the success of that business¹⁴.
- **GOVERNMENT SCRUTINY IS INCREASINGLY FOCUSED:** on the role that business plays in society and whether it truly supports the welfare of both people and planet, now and into the future. Initiatives such as the Scottish Just Transition Commission and the Welsh Future Generations Act demonstrate the priority with which the issue is viewed¹⁵.
 - **DIRECT BUSINESS BENEFITS:** evidence shows that a diverse workforce not only leads to healthier and happier employees, but that the diversity of thought the business can draw upon leads to more innovation and profitability¹⁶.

WHAT ACTION IS NEEDED FROM BUSINESS?

Business needs to demonstrate the social value of its operations and its role within the community by effectively engaging with all stakeholders, identifying the needs of key groups and working to ensure that those needs are met. BITC has a long history of supporting members to understand the needs of the communities they work in, producing work that emphasises the importance of this. This includes our [Stakeholder Capitalism Toolkit](#), [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#) and [advisory support on stakeholder mapping](#), as well as the [Involving Diverse Stakeholders for a Just Transition factsheet](#) that has informed this routemap¹⁷.

Even an industrial transformation that puts the economy on a sustainable footing and averts the worst effects of climate change could still be problematic for societal inequality because of the major changes to industry and employment that it would involve. Green jobs, for example, are overrepresented in the better-paid professional, scientific and technical sectors, creating the risk that those workers already in less stable or lower-paid jobs will struggle further as fewer jobs are available in their industry as the economy decarbonises¹⁸.

Aiming to embed diversity of thought into the strategic direction of a business will be far more successful than adopting a strategy that sees diversity internally or among external stakeholders as a challenge to be navigated. This routemap features several case studies from BITC members outlining the challenges they have faced and the solutions they developed in relation to engaging with diverse stakeholders.

Detail around the processes, benefits and challenges of properly involving diverse stakeholders in designing and delivering climate action are expanded upon throughout the document, broadly categorised under the following headings:

- **MAP:** Build upon existing relationships through personnel, procurement, or carbon reporting activities to understand how the business currently engages with stakeholders and which voices are absent from this dialogue.
- **INVOLVE:** Consider the role of business as a citizen and community member. Expand stakeholder consultation beyond direct relationships in order to understand where society needs support in becoming more healthy, resilient, and progressing towards net zero itself.
- **ACT:** It's not enough to listen; initiate processes that ensure stakeholder opinion is actively incorporated into strategy. Use the process to formalise engagement, ideally making permanent and embedded changes to the stakeholder engagement process.

THREE KEY FOCUS AREAS

MAP



START EARLY

The later you leave it to incorporate the views of external and internal stakeholders, the more difficult and costly it will be. Don't wait until the full project plan is formally agreed – begin as early as possible by consulting through pre-existing relationships, then build out from there. For example, employee resource groups within the business may exist and should be included in conversations and plans as they develop

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

There are likely to be structural reasons why the voices of diverse stakeholder groups are generally absent from planning discussions. Think about what these barriers to engagement might be, acknowledge what you don't know about who your diverse stakeholders are and conceptualise broadly about what issues may be a priority for them. Seek advice on the process with an open mind, reaching out to civil society groups or community engagement specialists where connections are needed beyond existing networks.

PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

An examination of the stakeholder engagement already ongoing should indicate which voices still need to be heard – then direct plans can be developed on how to proactively engage them. This is key to doing thorough and effective stakeholder engagement - an 'open door' policy alone will not be enough.

INVOLVE



VALUE INSIGHT

Value stakeholders and the insight that they can provide, incorporating their ideas and concerns into business action to support community and environment. This not only demonstrates that engagement is happening in good faith, enhancing the potential for future work between the business and its stakeholders, but also provides valuable insight into customer sentiment, public perception, and other issues important to business.

WELCOME CHALLENGE

Positive perception of business has declined significantly in recent years and stakeholder engagement presents an opportunity to rebuild that reputation. This process will naturally encounter groups who have traditionally been opposed to some of the businesses work, and so the challenge of hearing objection, then seeking to understand and overcome it should be welcomed. The most vocal opposition may already be familiar to business, but working with them to genuinely hear their concerns represents a means to reach their wider communities and networks too.

EMPHASISE LONGEVITY

Productive relationships take time to build, and meaningful inclusion can signal genuine intentions. Taking the time to formalise listening strategies, incorporating the lessons of each project into the next in order to demonstrate learning, strengthen relationships with different stakeholder groups, and build lasting community-level relationships.

ACT



PRIORITISE NEEDS

Determine what is important to your stakeholders, identify where their interests intersect with those of the business, and then implement plans aligned with this common goal. For example, climate action that threatens to destroy or offshore local employment would do more harm than good and so, transition plans must anticipate and address this. Crucially, the needs and concerns of communities may be very different from what outsiders expect them to be.

DEMONSTRATE ACTION

It is essential to show that engagement has been held in good faith and that the views shared have genuinely fed into planning for the products and services the business provides, as well as its wider policy. This will build trust and enable future collaboration, - with the lessons learned from the mapping and engagement process ideally being incorporated into feedback engagement forums to demonstrate how they have been integrated into official corporate strategy. Collective wins should highlight to stakeholders means by which they can engage with the business going forward.

INCORPORATE SUCCESS

After engagement has been carried out and projects created in collaboration with stakeholder groups, assess what went well and share the success to highlight community achievement and encourage other businesses in the same sector or area to follow. Lead communities of practice to involve a wider range of businesses in place-based projects and to be a living example of the business case for community engagement. This could theoretically be a dialogue that runs alongside a GHG emissions mapping process, facilities planning activities, or other core business activities to ensure that stakeholder voices are included as standard practice going forward. A key part of responsible business is continual improvement which includes reflections on what has gone well, what could be done better, and what's missing.

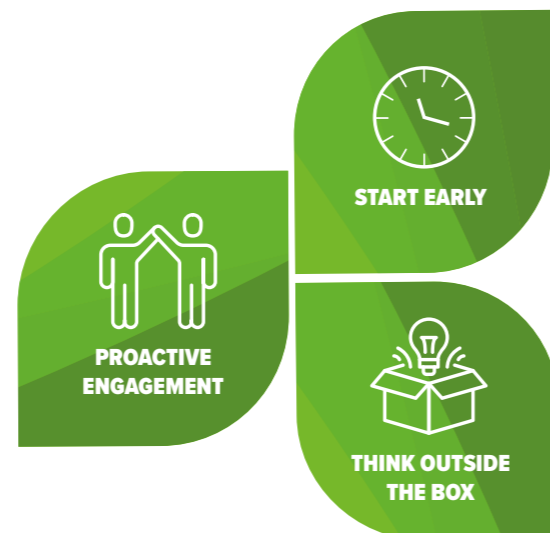
MAP

WHO AND WHERE ARE YOUR DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS?

As well as groups who indirectly depend on the economic activity that a business brings to the region where it operates, diverse stakeholders can equally be small-scale suppliers within the value chain of a business, the end-consumer of a product or service that the business provides, or even members of the community where the business operates.

Effective place-based relationships need to be built upon active outreach and listening programmes. Mapping can thus be developed upon the foundation of existing relationships through personnel, procurement, or carbon mapping activities to understand how the business currently engages with stakeholders and what voices are absent from this dialogue.

Most businesses will already track enterprise-level risk on modern slavery through worker surveys within their supply chain and so this work as well as climate-risk assessment can provide a foundation for diverse stakeholder mapping.



CASE STUDY: Sky

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT TO ENSURE AN ETHICAL SUPPLY CHAIN

Through its Sustainability strategy, Sky has delivered on a range of responsible business, environment and social impact initiatives addressing many of society's present and future challenges. Through Sky Zero Sky has committed to reaching net zero carbon by 2030 and supporting a just transition and climate justice.

Charlotte Brierley, Sky's Humans Right Lead said:

'Engaging stakeholders through our business and value chain is vital for reaching our net zero commitment with respect for human rights. We collaborate to tackle challenges together from removing single-use plastic and getting to net zero to improving working conditions.'

Examples of this include running worker wellbeing surveys with our suppliers, to recommend improvements that would make a valued difference to workers lives. And we've held forums with employee networks, production and security colleagues to encourage more inclusive conversations and security practices when making TV content, and joined a collaborative initiative to develop responsible sourcing guidelines for solar.'

Sky's stakeholder engagement goes beyond current environmental and social challenges, seeking to understand and amplify the voices of future generations. Using its platform to hear and raise the voices of young people around the world, Sky Kids surveyed 2,000 children aged 7-14 and highlighted their priorities in content leading up to the COP27 summit – stressing that only 10% of children thought that government was doing enough to tackle climate change.

Sky Kid's also created [COP27: 6 Ways to Save our Planet](#), championing the stories of six young climate activists from around the world, showing the innovative things being done to help fight the climate crisis where they live-from mega-farms to floating cities and tree planting.

CASE STUDY: Iceland

DOING IT RIGHT, A LONG-STANDING CULTURE OF LISTENING AND OPEN LEADERSHIP

Since its foundation, Iceland has built a community of five million regular shoppers, and through 1,000 stores across the UK, it has become deeply embedded in the areas it serves. Through its core business culture of 'Doing it Right', Iceland focuses on convenient food products but also delivers innovation and value.

'Doing it Right' was established by founder Sir Malcolm Walker and translates into a business that actively cares for its customers, empowering colleagues to feed into decisions on how the business can help the surrounding communities to develop resilience and thrive in challenging circumstances. Iceland's ability to do this effectively comes from its employees; over 70% of the group's 30,000 workers live within three miles of the store they work in, bringing a direct bond with and understanding of the community they live in.

Through the two-way Talking Shop communication channel, store colleagues can nominate a representative who will voice their opinion and raise business ideas directly to central management. This creates a safe space to receive challenging ideas from employees, demonstrates meaningful workforce engagement and has delivered both innovation and value to the business.

Richard Walker, Executive Chair of Iceland explained the success of the engagement strategy as:

'Iceland is family-run, and we work hard to extend that sense of family looking out for each other within the culture of the business. My 30,000 colleagues are passionate about their customers and their communities and are a constant source of intelligence and empathy in how we support them. They have a direct route to the boardroom via our Talking Shop scheme, and I speak to them in stores every week, which means our people are very much the engine room of our sustainability strategy. Their advice and innovation drive what we do.'



START EARLY

Don't wait for a perfect strategy

Changing strategies to incorporate the views of stakeholders consulted during the project is costly or even impossible. Rather than wait until a full stakeholder engagement strategy has been signed off, it is best to begin as early as possible, building on existing stakeholder relationships such as employee resource forums and getting the process socialised widely within the business so that it becomes a part of all planning.

Companies sourcing minerals or agricultural commodities are likely to have long and complex supply chains within which many people will not have a voice, making it difficult to recognise when the process has been successful in reaching everyone.

Resources:

- For beginning the process academic work covering the interdependencies among stakeholders within the supply chain can be useful, for example: Lokesh, K., Ladu, L., & Summerton, L. (2018). Bridging the gaps for a 'circular' bioeconomy: Selection criteria, bio-based value chain and stakeholder mapping. *Sustainability*, 10(6), 1695.
- Taylor, A and Bancelhon, C. (2019). [Five-Step Approach to Stakeholder Engagement](#). Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)



THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Acknowledge the unknown

Seek advice with an open mind from groups who can potentially act as routes to diverse stakeholders, being aware that there are always likely to be diverse voices and stakeholder concerns that the business is unaware of.

Attempting to segment stakeholder groups based upon some characteristics such as income or race may not be appropriate in every case because it can foster stereotypes.

A focus on low income for example can be synonymous with working-class people but may actually engage pensioners, middle-class students or downsizers who temporarily or voluntarily have a lower income, and so it is preferable to begin with an open process and only focus later on those voices still absent.

Resources:

- This legal analysis of all references to stakeholder groups in UK law provides a starting point to consider who needs to be included in the definition as a bare minimum: Milman, D. (2017). [Stakeholders in modern UK company law](#). Sweet and Maxwell's Company Law Newsletter, (397), 1-4.
- Place-based engagement on climate action has no universal approach, but is the subject to much helpful research: Schweizer, S., Davis, S., & Thompson, J. L. (2013). [Changing the conversation about climate change: A theoretical framework for place-based climate change engagement](#). *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 7(1), 42-62.



PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Seek out overlooked voices

There are no shortcuts to proper outreach. Removing the barriers to participation by whatever means available should always be the goal, even providing transport or taking other measures to ensure that voices beyond the usual are engaged. This may require going beyond enabling and involve actively facilitating dialogue – it may not be possible to recognise the barriers to participation that some groups may face²⁰.

Resources:

- Gartner's reviews and ratings of supply chain planning solutions provide an insight into the various software products available for the technical side of the process: Gartner. (2022). [Supply Chain Planning Solutions Review and Ratings](#). Gartner Peer Insights.
- Government Communication Service. (2021). [Ensuring Effective Stakeholder Engagement](#).

WINNING LOOKS LIKE:

- At its best, stakeholder mapping may reveal opportunities to work with communities, suppliers or other stakeholders to not only improve the climate strategy of the business, but also support communities on their journey to a net zero, resilient future.
- Effective mapping means not only reaching the voices typically excluded from both business and government planning for the future, but also understanding what the priorities and concerns of such groups are and developing specific strategies to address them.
- Place-based community engagement that hears from a genuinely representative cross-section of the community will use targeted efforts beyond simply hosting an open forum.
- Involving community groups or other listening organisations is the first step in reaching out to stakeholders that you don't yet know. These new communication channels act as a bridge to other groups and can help build the trust needed to deepen stakeholder involvement.

WATCH OUTS:

- Opinions on poverty, diverse communities, or even local needs can be based upon inaccurate stereotypes or a lack of relatable experience. Standpoint theory and related concepts demonstrate how marginalised groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of issues than it is for the privileged non-marginalised²¹.
- Groups that are easier to locate and to work with should not be prioritised as stakeholder partners simply because it's an easier option. Reviewing census data to understand demographic changes within local areas could provide useful insight in seeking to build relationships with all the diverse groups within regions, towns and villages.
- Initiatives to make communities 'safer' or 'greener' can often mean enhanced security or one-off nature projects, omitting to address the structural deprivation or other systemic problems that are at the heart of the issue.

GETTING STARTED:

- BITC supports its members via an [advisory offer](#) on stakeholder mapping which is a great place to start the process.
- Consider the practices that are already active locally and how they could be replicated within complex global value chains – diverse stakeholder engagement is likely to be undertaken as part of your supply chain risk mapping.
- Get buy-in from senior management early on in any project on the need and means to engage with stakeholder groups. Having this engagement integrated from the outset means that dialogue is formally required to advance the project and so the necessary resources can be allocated to achieve this.
- Where a business lacks the local footprint or social impact expertise necessary, external support from VCSEs with the necessary insights and access to diverse stakeholders pools can provide a solution. Likewise, community-based organisations such as [Groundwork](#) or [Citizens UK](#) can support with establishing community dialogue and initiating engagement processes.

INVOLVE

INCLUSION THAT GOES BEYOND CONSULTATION

Consider corporate social purpose and the role of business as a citizen and community member.

Expand stakeholder engagement beyond direct relationships to understand where communities need support in becoming more healthy, resilient, and making their own progress towards net zero. It has become normal for business to adopt targets for things such as carbon emissions, water consumption, and plastic waste production. Any organisation that is serious about the health of their local communities and environment should implement social impact targets that prioritise these.



CASE STUDY: Centrica

COMMUNITY-LED ENERGY TRANSITION

Centrica's [People and Planet Plan](#) defines its long-term goals to support their customers and their communities to live sustainably, simply and affordably. In recognising and embracing the need for a just transition, Centrica is focused on seizing the opportunities and minimising the risks that arise during the journey to net zero, with the aim of ensuring a fair and affordable transition for all and where no one is left behind.

This commitment to support customers is exemplified by the Energy for Tomorrow social impact fund. Energy for Tomorrow has supported local projects with funding and other non-financial support through Centrica's colleague volunteering network to help communities reach net zero.

Sarah Wright, Energy for Tomorrow Programme Manager, highlighted the relevance of this non-financial support:

'Through our years of working on this programme we found out that expert support is just as valuable as funding. This could include introducing the project to customers or suppliers we work with, or just being able to share expertise. That's an advantage to the project, the community project volunteers receive an assurance that what they are doing is right.'

Energy for Tomorrow are empowering communities to tackle climate change and are running a 3-year programme of regional campaigns, engaging with communities, energy organisations and other networks. Energy for Tomorrow can signpost the fund to potential projects and learn from the community insights. Funding has supported projects like [BRAG Enterprises](#) who are supporting their local community in Scotland with energy and employability advice as they strive to become a carbon-neutral organisation; [Yorkshire Methodists North and East District](#) who are installing solar panels on 6 churches to help them meet their target of being net zero by 2040 and engaging with their community to educate them on sustainable technologies; and [First Thermal](#), who offer internal thermal imaging surveys for residential properties to identify where low-cost retrofit measures can be installed to help residents save energy and keep warm.

CASE STUDY: NatWest

ENGAGING WITH THE FARMING COMMUNITY TO PRESERVE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

In 2020 NatWest set a goal to reach net zero by 2050 in line with the UK's overall strategy and advanced to at least halve the climate impact of their financing activity by 2030. A year later the business went even further and following conversations with NGOs and other stakeholders recognised nature and biodiversity loss as an emerging risk, meaning that risk reporting and other requirements now needed to be met and processes followed to ensure that NatWest were increasingly playing their part in preserving the natural world.

Membership of the Science-based Targets Initiative and evaluation of lending according to its criteria revealed agriculture to be one of the most emissions-intensive being funded. As a UK-focused bank, NatWest are the chief lender to over a third of the country's agricultural sector, much of which is smaller farms and family-owned businesses. NatWest used this insight to identify and address the data gaps where SMEs and smaller farms often have insufficient time or resources to manage their environmental impact. A partnership with the Sustainable Food Trust then helped to hear more voices from farming communities and to jointly develop a Global Farming Metric which was successfully piloted with NatWest customers before being further developed.

According to Rhona Thurnbull, Climate, Environment & Emerging Issues Lead:

'We need to know that our customers are reducing their climate impact and biodiversity loss as well. So from a banking perspective, first we need the data to show that our footprint is reducing, but the opportunity here is that we can provide finance to provide the tools and investments that will enable customers to reduce their footprint.'

The project recognised that data quality is key for a business to be transparent and open on climate, but also that there were significant obstacles to collecting accurate environmental data within the agricultural sector. NatWest also provide finance to enable agricultural customers to reduce their environmental impact, and with verifiable data to show this, farms are then qualified to tender for supermarket and other contracts as an outlet for their produce, delivering a healthy and sustainable food system alongside an economically thriving farming sector.



VALUE INSIGHT

Recognising diverse insight as a resource.

Value stakeholders and the insight they can provide, treating such information with the same regard as you would give to market research or a management consultant.

Ongoing dialogue with governments, competitors, suppliers, communities, and other individuals and groups are an opportunity for the business to learn and develop. Insight gained through engagement can work two ways: providing the business with information about the stakeholders affected by its activity, but also how stakeholders as consumers, workers and neighbours feel about the business, its products and performance.

Resources:

- Weber, J. (2014). Business and Society: Stakeholders, Ethics, Public Policy. McGraw-Hill Higher.
- Nestlé's [Human Rights Framework and Roadmap](#) provides an excellent chronological and illustrated description of how the business applied a human rights lens to identify and engage with stakeholders throughout the entirety of their value chain.



WELCOME CHALLENGES

Learning from opposition

Positive perception of business has declined significantly in recent years in reaction to poor quality jobs, environmentally damaging behaviour, or simply the profit-first motives that have led to many companies playing little or no part in the development of communities²².

If leaders can become comfortable sitting with the discomfort of being challenged, they build the trust needed to become a valuable community member helping to meet community priorities as well as delivering their own strategic objectives.

Dissenting communities can even become part of an ongoing working relationship, allowing the business to test where ideas or campaigns are unpopular and to stop or alter them rather than eventually face allegations of greenwashing.

Resources:

- The Responsible Business Alliance's (members-only) [Risk Assessment Platform](#) provides a methodology for an early high-level risk assessment within supply chains: Responsible Business Alliance. (2023). [Risk Assessment Platform](#).
- Green Alliance's 2023 report [Green Expectations: Involving communities in landscape change](#) provides examples of how to involve communities in the often-controversial issue of changes in land use or management as part of environmental planning.
- Although the approach will differ with each stakeholder group, the IPPR's 2022 on climate messaging provides a good overview on how to gather support from environmental action - Akehurst, S., & Murphy, L. (2022). [A rising tide: strengthening public permission for climate action](#). IPPR



EMPHASISE LONGEVITY

A marathon, not a sprint.

Genuine stakeholder engagement does not have an end date; the best collaboration comes from longer-term relationships that grow through the mutual trust that comes with time.

Once initial dialogue processes have been developed, the next stage is to build dialogue into everyday work as an ongoing activity²³.

Resources:

- Futerra's 2011 report, [Sell The Sizzle: The New Climate Message](#) is the best-known example of how to sell a longer-term vision.
- Groundwork's [From the Ground Up report](#) provides definitions and examples of how communities can be empowered and supported in the long-term through training and the creation of community hubs.

WINNING LOOKS LIKE:

- Regular dialogue with a range of stakeholders can help to pre-empt problems. By involving people upfront, business can get input into designing solutions to tricky problems so that they have the best impact for people and the planet.
- The best-case scenario sees communities supported by business as a key long-term partner. Such assistance could be as direct income support for displaced workers or other measures while they retrain and find new jobs as their industry undergoes a transition²⁴.
- Convening a formal deliberative process can include multiple stakeholder voices into a planning process proportionately²⁵, allowing a wider variety of interests to be represented, and avoid the perception of undue influence by those stakeholders highly motivated to participate²⁶.

WATCH OUTS:

- Not only is stakeholder dialogue not a time-bound project, but it should have ongoing cycles of planning, acting and reflection. Future employees, customers, and neighbours of a business are as important as the current ones, and so effective youth engagement is needed to reach these voices too.
- Working predominantly with self-selecting or already supportive groups is unlikely to reach or benefit any of the more diverse groups currently excluded from most discussions. Though more difficult to work with, good-faith engagement requires listening to those with opposing views and being prepared to change your mind.
- Relying upon one-off listening exercises or informal engagement mechanisms can mean that some voices or opinions are excluded and that there is no weighting or other mechanism in place to determine the strength of feeling around specific issues.

GETTING STARTED:

- Pre-existing groups that are opposed to the business represent an opportunity to begin engagement: understanding the issues that have led to their negative perception of the business can be a foundation on which to build environmental or social projects that address stakeholder concerns.
- Make use of unorthodox methods of engagement or even offering monetary payment for consultation as this demonstrates that stakeholder opinions are recognised as being of value, not a means to avoid negative public perception or to get already-agreed plans rubber stamped.
- Using a neutral facilitator or forum is one means to ensure that all voices are heard and that the strength of feeling around specific issues is clear.

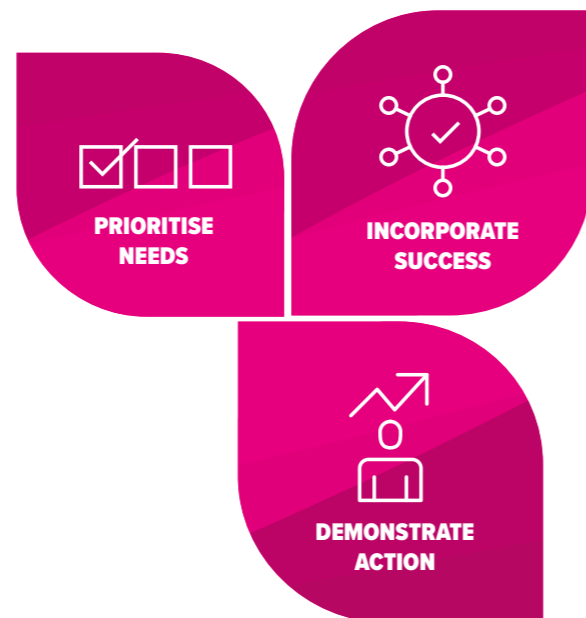
ACT

EMBED DIALOGUE IN BUSINESS PLANNING

Meaningful inclusion in all future business planning should be the conclusion of any stakeholder engagement exercise.

From the perspective of stakeholder groups, the experience of being listened to and involved in collaborative projects to benefit their communities should be an incentive to build stronger future relationships with the business.

From the business perspective, the process should lead to formalised structures to ensure that diverse voices are included by design into all future strategy relating to climate action and beyond.



CASE STUDY: National Grid

UNDERSTANDING MATERIALITY THROUGH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In 2019 National Grid began to take a new step towards responsibility and transparency, aiming to deliver the highest positive impact on society and publishing their 2020 Responsible Business Charter in support of this. Whilst National Grid has recognised the need to be a responsible business and deliver a clean energy future, more recently the company has been working to ensure that is done in such a way that no one is left behind as the world transitions to a clean energy future which set in motion the creation of stakeholder engagement forums intended to feed into the company's forthcoming statement.

With a huge constituency of stakeholders to consider, National Grid has learned through experience how to do effective engagement and believes that consultation is not about sending out surveys, but rather focusing on where they need a better understanding of stakeholder needs and the scale of potential impact.

Whilst the company retains its broader outreach with schools in order to reach as many students as possible to inspire careers in energy, their current strategy understands that those students have not necessarily been impacted by the company programmes in depth and that resources should also be directed towards driving outcomes for these students particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Time should also be spent measuring the quality of the impacts being made, which could mean helping someone to access higher education, and upon graduation to assist them in working for National Grid.

As Dina Potter, Vice President of Social Impact said:

'That's why we do materiality assessments, to ensure we are listening. We solicit feedback from a range of stakeholders, user groups and advisory boards and involve them in developing our strategy and to challenge our thinking.'

Developing skills for youth has emerged as another material issue and National Grid have made a long-term commitment to it, supporting younger generations from three to 15 years old in engaging on the industry and environmental issues, and for 16 to 25 year olds through apprenticeships and practical careers or supported university undergraduate and post-graduate schemes as well as paid work placements.

CASE STUDY: Southern Co-op

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO DEVELOP

As a consumer-facing cooperative, Southern Co-op has a long history of putting social purpose at the heart of its business and continues to develop new ways of listening to and supporting communities. Formed almost 150 years ago in response to the societal challenges of that time, Southern Co-op still works to tackle the same issues of poverty and inequality today.

Southern Co-op values are about helping people to help themselves, so to Embed and Encourage responsible business is a key pillar of their business strategy. At grassroots level this is embodied by the Love your Neighbourhood community strategy which supports smaller local organisations with funding, goods donations, volunteering and community engagement, ensuring that everything is locally led.

Identification of the priority issues to tackle comes from listening to its community partners including, BITC and Neighbourly (a B-Corp that links businesses to charitable organisations) and the views of Southern Co-op's own colleague and customer members.

As Gemma Lacey, their Director of Sustainability and Communications explained:

'Concern for our communities is one of our founding principles as a co-op. Working together with others to address community issues also provides a solution to business-critical issues. So, finding community partnerships that are a good fit and have a clear connect back into the business, creates relationships that are mutually beneficial and have longevity.'

The Safer Neighbourhoods Fund, an example of this, was created in response to rising incidences of crime in and around its stores. Alongside other actions to protect its people funding has been directed to communities in high-risk areas to tackle the root causes of crime. Its first round of funding supported more than 1,300 people including offenders and/or those at risk of offending. The programme has helped demonstrate to store colleagues and neighbours that Southern Co-op prioritises their safety and has a long-standing commitment to keeping its communities safe.



PRIORITISE NEEDS

Understanding different challenges

Genuine inclusion of a particular stakeholder group and business action to benefit that community means first understanding what is of priority to that group.

The sustainability division within most companies will already be familiar with the concept of a materiality assessment and this same process can be applied to understand what the key issues and concerns are for a community. As covered under **Think outside the box**, there is a temptation to hold certain beliefs about what issues may be of primary importance to specific groups, often based on incorrect assumptions.

Resources:

- Though basic in scope, this article on [how to conduct a community needs assessment](#) is a good starting point when thinking about the first stages of place-based engagement.
- Haxeltine, A., & Seyfang, G. (2009). Transitions for the People: Theory and Practice of 'transition' and 'resilience' in the UK's Transition Movement (pp. 1-24). Tyndall Centre.



DEMONSTRATE ACTION

Listen first, then implement

Demonstrating that engagement has been held in good faith and that the views shared have genuinely fed into strategy is essential to build trust and enable future collaboration. Incorporate the lessons learned from the process to inform the next phase of development and make sure you clearly show how input has both informed strategy and given a clear rationale for why you have not acted on any issues.

Examples of success should lead to a commitment of stakeholder engagement becoming institutionalised within the business, even embedding consultation norms and forums within the strategy development process²⁷.

Resources:

- Franklin, A. L. (2020). Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes. in Stakeholder Engagement. Springer, Cham.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's [Talking about Poverty: Lessons learnt](#) report highlights (in its conclusions) the importance of communicating a clear theory of change and project strategy as well as having monitoring, evaluation, learning and impact assessment activities throughout the project lifecycle.



INCORPORATE SUCCESS

Integrate continuous learning

The best examples of working with diverse stakeholders are those that are emulated by others and eventually become accepted best practice, making business more accountable to its stakeholders.

Listening and responding to different perspectives, ensuring communication is honest and transparent is vital. Creating shared benefits for a business and its stakeholders and sharing the learnings will help encourage other businesses to follow suit.

Making sure that stakeholders who gave their time and input see that they were valued and that their views have influenced business strategy will be important to build trusting relationships that lead to further mutual benefits. Highlighting success and reflecting on where things didn't go as planned will enhance future opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders too, as participants see that their time and opinions were valued and how their views have informed how business is conducted²⁸.

Retrospective evaluation against Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology will also support business impact reporting with tangible measures.

Resources:

- UK Cabinet Office. (2012). [Resources Library: A Guide to Social Return on Investment 2012](#). Social Value UK
- Insights from the World Benchmarking Alliance's 2022 [Corporate Human Rights Benchmark](#) demonstrate the poor record of business in acting on stakeholder engagement, and the means by which this can be improved.
- BITC's [How to Inspire, Hire and Grow Diverse Talent](#) report demonstrates how your business can support diverse communities and attract future employees from within them.
- The London borough of Newham instituted a [permanent citizens assembly](#) which immediately chose "greening the borough" as its first priority, and which serves as a good example of how the sortition process can be implemented.

WINNING LOOKS LIKE:

- Success is where business demonstrates the tangible social safety net that it can provide – from ensuring that local people can afford their products and services to helping to support schools and civil society organisations that ensure community health and resilience²⁹.
- When it comes to meaningful inclusion of stakeholder voices, success can be defined as the formal incorporation of engagement processes into corporate strategy development and sign-off as well as defined commitments to act on the issues raised in the process.
- Co-creation projects should be inspirational, selling to the community a positive vision of what can be achieved locally through cooperation and business support. This means co-developing a vision for the future of the community that goes beyond addressing specific issues or problems, setting a 'north star' vision of what a healthy, resilient net zero community could look like.

WATCH OUTS:

- One-off events, investments and PR campaigns give quick wins but do nothing to bring communities together and support them in further planning. The most valuable contribution of business could be the provision of longer-term organisational and material support.
- Undertaking consultation in bad faith or after key decisions have already been made, seeking only to meet consultation requirements or demonstrate local support will only sour relations between a business and its stakeholders, Squandering what could have been an opportunity to undertake meaningful social and environmental action together³⁰.
- Although ambition and inspiration are necessary components in the plans between companies and their stakeholders, businesses should take care not to over-promise what can be achieved within the project timeframe and with the available resources³¹.

GETTING STARTED:

- Ensure the same level of planning and resourcing for projects as would be available for any business activity. A lack of clarity or credibility around planning will undermine the trust that is needed for successful co-creation and so projects need to be properly resourced and well-managed, just as commercially oriented ventures would be.
- Many businesses may already be familiar with some of the processes that can be used to seek feedback and incorporate the results of consultation. In some contexts, for example, stakeholders could hold a focus-group type status, assisting in policy or performance and providing honest feedback³².
- The eventual engagement mechanisms developed may be citizens' juries, dedicated board representation, or other listening mechanisms. To be truly effective, any process should clearly define how stakeholder voices influence business action.

WHAT NEXT?

1. Use our Seven Steps for Climate Action

to create your just transition plan covering each of the seven steps.

Sign up to show your commitment and track your progress.

2. Accelerate and track your progress

with BITC's Responsible Business Tracker®.

4. Get bespoke help

with your just transition plan from our advisory team.

Speak to your relationship manager.

5. If you're not yet a member, join BITC

to access our network and support.

THANK YOU

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