Stakeholder plans are critical for understanding and connecting to the knowledge and concerns of community and stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objective’.

Step 1. Define your goal
This Note is using urban forests as its example for applying evidence-based stakeholder management.

An ‘urban forest’ covers all trees, shrubs, lawn and pervious soils in urban areas. It moves beyond planning for a single street to considering the health, diversity and canopy of the whole ‘forest’.

An ‘urban forest’ is a type of green infrastructure and as such this Best Practice Note can also be used for broader ‘green infrastructure’ engagement programs.

Action: Determine which components of green infrastructure are to be included in your objective.

Step 2. Consider extent of stakeholder involvement
A comprehensive approach to community engagement is proven to support urban forest sustainability.

Recommended criteria include:
1. public agency cooperation
2. links with large private and institutional landholders
3. green industry cooperation
4. neighbourhood action
5. citizen-municipality business interaction
6. general awareness of trees as a community resource
7. regional cooperation.

To engage with your stakeholders, ideally draw from technical and community experts across multiple disciplines to collate the most holistic input.

Better Best Practice Note
Stakeholder Engagement Plan - Urban Forest

Some engagement programs choose to focus on a lead objective to prevent mixed messages. This approach needs to ensure it is not underestimating the ability of stakeholders and community to work through this complexity for a shared beneficial outcome.

Given that many decisions are more often about values than facts, it is important to understand what is ‘valued by people’ as this will shape future activities and decisions. The values of practitioners are often different from those of the community.

Policy writers, planners and project managers are tasked with deciding who is a stakeholder for any given project. This seemingly innocuous task holds great power.

An example of this particularly relates to engagement with indigenous communities whereby an officer may decide that the indigenous connection to country is too disrupted to hold continued importance. We need to give space for aboriginal communities to make this decision about their own connections to country.

Action: Use the starting lists overleaf to consider the external and internal stakeholders that play an important role in the future success of an urban forest program. These lists are done from the perspective of a municipal Council, and will need adapting for other land managers.

Stakeholders may respond to different objectives of urban forest planning

- Reduce impact of heat waves
- Reduce impact of flooding
- Reduce impact of drought
- Improve waterway health
- Improve soil health
- Improve air quality
- Improve habitat and biodiversity
- Reduce greenhouse emissions
- Improve human physical health
- Improve human mental health
- Improve economic development
- Lessen impact of urban growth
- Improve financial management
- Improve asset management
- Improve precinct management

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3 Dobbs C, Kendall D, Nitschke CR (2014) Multiple ecosystem services and disservices of the urban forest establishing their connections with landscape structure and sociodemographics. Ecological Indicators 43:44-55
**Step 3. Undertake stakeholder analysis**

Stakeholders are central to the success of a project. At worst, stakeholders can threaten a project and at best they can help a program move well beyond expectations.

It is valuable to ‘diagnose’ each stakeholder to make strategic decisions on interactions and find ways to transform any less favourable relationships to more favourable ones\(^9\). It is important to acknowledge these relationships will change over time.

Urban forest expansion is generally supported by community; however the following is a categorisation of likely ‘non-supportive’ sectors in the community.

‘Tree Hazard Minimisers’  
People most likely to remove or cut back trees that interfere with infrastructure or had the potential for limb fall. Some of these concerns are based on perceived fear and whilst this fear is likely to be impermeable to change, it is important that this ‘perceived fear’ is not spread.

‘Aboriphobes’  
People who see trees as a problem. They are most likely to remove or resist tree planting for most reasons – blocked light, messy trees, dangerous trees and trees as a traffic hazard. These people are generally impervious to change, and it is better to focus in alternative areas.

‘Utility Providers’  
On-ground staff responsible for laying and maintaining infrastructure services in public space (eg: powerlines, water pipes, sewerage pipes, telecommunication wires). Landscapers and plumbers also face the same challenges of limited underground space. These on-ground problems need an ‘upstream’ solution for better bundling or aligning of services.

‘Native Wildlife Lovers’  
People who believe that indigenous planting is the priority and that exotic species should not be supported even in highly urban areas.

**Step 4. Consider timeframes**

Research shows that planning beyond an immediate project to the longer term will maximise the chance of meeting objectives.

The preparation of a stakeholder engagement plan can focus on short term needs, whilst setting out general longer-term considerations to ensure maximum success\(^9\).

Action: Consider ways for your urban forest program to work across three timeframes to help ensure its success:

a) short term (1 year): includes participation and consultation to develop Urban Forest Strategy

b) medium term (3 years): includes initial adaptive learning projects, systems, partnerships, precinct planning, capacity building and communication

c) longer term (beyond 3 years): continued projects, monitoring, integration with other policies.

**What can urban forest planning deliver that land managers don’t already do?**

- Helps make planting easier on public land
  - Links healthy vegetation to multiple Council objectives.
  - This is a shift to ‘service planning’ approach
  - Improves the business case for works and maintenance
  - Combines these commitments for role clarity

- Understands how all our vegetation fits together
  - Proactive in dealing with free dieback over long term
  - Reduces vulnerability of vegetation through species diversity
  - Designs for multiple functions in single spaces
  - Helps community be involved in caring for vegetation

- Helps value the wider contribution of private gardens
  - Landscaping by large land managers
  - Gardening by our residents and small business
  - Provides strategic basis for planning scheme review

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Step 5. Apply evidence-based engagement

Design engagement activities to incorporate the following principles known to maximise success.

a. Trust and Flexibility

Trust is arising as a fundamental key to success for stakeholder relationships. Given that projects like urban forest programs are dealing with unknown futures, it is the concept of trust and the ‘willingness to be vulnerable’ that is needed most between project leaders and stakeholders. Supporting community-led initiatives, and enabling co-design of policy are great examples of trust.

A lack of trust often leads to actions including extended contracts, withholding information and linking to economic consequences. Building trust for long term relationships is the ideal achievement for ongoing commitments such as urban forests.

To generate more trust, project managers must open up, share more knowledge and put in more effort to increase the stakeholder’s sense of satisfaction.

Research shows that complex projects such as this urban forest program with its multiple objectives, timeframes and boundaries, are best designed with flexibility to deal with stakeholders needs over time.

Many practitioners avoid open engagement as they are nervous the conversations will head down a path that is outside the project scope. It is important that this fear is not your guiding approach.

Deal with this concern by providing the project scope, and the limiting project factors (eg budget or other community concerns), and evidence-based advice to help support decisions.

The ‘wisdom of the group’ will respond to this, and in the rare event that the group decides the scope itself is the problem, then this is important and valid community knowledge that may need you to go back to the drawing board. This in itself is a valuable outcome.

Action: Shift away from the traditional approach of engagement to trust the community to lead more decisions and projects. This requires the practitioner to spend more time providing evidence-based advice for consideration.

b. Social Learning

With the scale and complexity of climate adaptation programs (such as an urban forest program), there has been an industry shift from ‘participation’ to ‘social learning’.

This means a shift from educational emphasis for individuals to collective knowledge growth in relation to shared projects. By learning together, it is more likely that goals can be combined, knowledge can be co-created, and ultimately behaviours changed.

Social learning enables old structures, regulations and relations to be challenged and potentially transform situations. Adaptation is a co-evolutionary process.

Action: Give people the space to change, co-evolve and to be ongoing with their engagement as this will bring out the greater potential.

c. Adaptive Design

Social learning works side by side with ‘adaptive design’ or a ‘learning by doing’ approach.

Adaptive design enables plans and policies to be developed in a context of uncertainty and incomplete knowledge. It accelerates innovation and helps overcome perceived obstacles.

Not only does adaptive design allow for mistakes, but it also builds in processes to ensure monitoring and variations of future works as part of an ongoing capacity building program for the wider industry.

Action: Incorporate aspects of ‘adaptive design’ or a ‘learning by doing’ approach into your engagement. Trial ideas and give permission to fail and learn from mistakes.

d. Placemaking and Stewardship

Design principles for transformation towards sustainability need to include a strong sense of place and the collective engagement of key stakeholders in decision-making, especially those with stewardship values.

Placemaking lets local people design and change the urban landscape in ways that they value. This can eschew a pure ‘design aesthetic’ but will generally be more true to local character, needs and desires. This in turn engenders stewardship and care in people for that space.

Action: Incorporate design principles that allow for stakeholders to draw on a sense of place and their values of stewardship.

Step 6. Plan engagement activities

There are many ways to draw on expertise and engage people on their future urban forest. Suggestions include:

1. Steering Group

A Steering Group comprising different industry and community representatives is valuable for sharing knowledge, generating ideas and possible links, and establishing a sense of stewardship.

Based on the principles of stakeholder engagement, the following features are recommended:

a) Roundtables are held as early as possible to enable time to influence direction.

b) The invitee list to the roundtable is to be as broad as possible, including broad staff representation. This may need to be done in linked sessions to ensure they are not too large and impersonal (ideally with a sample precinct-based group to give an awareness of issues that arise closer to community and place).

c) The roundtables answer positive questions and consider partner links in short and longer terms. The purpose of the roundtable is for the group to consider ways to grow the local urban forest (the purpose is not solely to ‘tick off’ the plan).

Some recommended questions for the Steering Group:

- how can urban forestry enhancements help you achieve your own organisational objectives?
- in what ways can a regional approach help to enhance urban forest growth and health?
- what are your suggestions for overcoming the space constraints for tree growth over the long term?
- what are your suggestions for increasing community awareness of the ‘true value of a tree’?
- what are some ideas for improving soil health and passive watering opportunities for trees?
- what are the gaps and ideas for linking and increasing knowledge of people working in various parts of the urban forest industry?

Action: Set up a Steering Group to provide diverse ideas and opportunities for specialists to consider the concerns of people from different areas of expertise.

2. General Communications

Standard consultation requirements will also need to be undertaken in alignment with regulatory requirements for municipal strategy making. Poster, newspaper notice, library copies, front desk copy, email lists, notice to relevant community groups.

Consider online competitions to connect to an urban forest program. Tell us your favourite tree? If you were an urban forester for a day, what would you plan for? Tell us where you think more greenery is needed in your neighbourhood?

Action: Consider a broad range of communications approaches ensuring you are aligning any regulatory requirements for consultation.

3. Pop Up Urban Forest

Creating a ‘pop up urban forest’ in a high-profile location, on an otherwise ‘hot’, ‘hard’ site would provide a great focal point for development of an urban forest program. In particular, the benefits of this approach include:

- reaching out to general community for input, co-design and consultation. There can be blackboards for leaving comments, or journals in nearby shops to fill in a survey, or leaving a comment via social media (all motivated by prizes). It is also likely to generate some media interest which can help reach out to the general public.
- partnerships and social learning. The partnership could be with a private landholder or school providing space or sponsorship for the pop-up urban forest. Or it could be with a research body providing a student project or gathering some data. Or it could be with an existing community group or community garden interested in doing a ‘pop up’ activity. This would help build ongoing community stewardship.
- on-ground gardening workshops. Community interest in gardening is very high and a practical workshop on how to improve soil, prune fruit trees or design for birds applies learning in a way that links to the urban forest input and learning.

An ideal scenario is partnering with community groups, school or library or private landholder.

Action: Consider whether a ‘pop up urban forest’ is a suitable activity as part of your engagement planning.
4. Participatory Art Project

Participatory art is an emergent method for community conversations. An art product from a participatory process involving partners from across a divide or a boundary (such as policy makers vs indigenous knowledge holders) is significant as a focal point for deliberation\(^\text{16}\).

Art can synthesise and convey complex information; enable people to look at issues in a different way; touch people’s emotions, and create a celebratory atmosphere\(^\text{17}\). Such projects always start with a question that is posed to participants. Participatory art may be individual or collaborative, and should be as unrestricted as possible so as to allow for a creative process.

It is recommended to investigate whether an Aboriginal community would like to provide feedback via a participatory art project to draw out traditional and current connections to land that can help shape urban forest planning.

**Action:** Consider whether a ‘participatory art project’ is a suitable activity as part of your engagement planning.

5. Hands-On Workshops and Community Forums

Community interest in gardening is very high and a series of practical workshops on how to improve soil, prune fruit trees or design for birds applies learning in a way that links to the urban forest input and learning.

Gardening workshop programs can likely be shared by My Smart Garden (inner west municipal gardening program). Gardening workshops are best held in partnership with a community group – at a community garden group, a planting group at a revegetation site, a men’s shed group, or a parents and children’s group at a school.

Community forums about bigger picture issues can also be run with a ‘social learning’ approach. Inviting two engaging speakers for knowledge sharing, and then asking the group for feedback could also be run in conjunction with a ‘come and learn placemaking for your street’ workshop. This simple placemaking design exercise will bring the importance of vegetation in the context of other liveability objectives.

It is also recommended that staff attend a few relevant community group meetings (community gardens, planting groups, trader groups) to talk about urban forest opportunities.

**Action:** Consider whether ‘hands-on workshops’ or ‘community forums’ are suitable activities as part of your engagement planning.

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\(^{16}\) Zurba M and Berkes F (2014) Caring for country through participatory art: creating a boundary object for communicating Indigenous knowledge and values. Local Environment Vol 19, No 8, 821-836

## Internal stakeholders – Sample List

**Better Best Practice Note – Urban Forest Stakeholder Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Teams</th>
<th>How can an Urban Forest program help with your objectives?</th>
<th>Likely Stakeholder Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriculture &amp; Streetscapes</td>
<td>Designs will reduce future tree obstructions. There will be more coordinated community messaging. True value of trees will be increasingly recognised which supports maintenance budget.</td>
<td>Aboriculture &amp; Streetscapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space Maintenance</td>
<td>Coordinated community messaging. True value of trees increasingly recognised which supports maintenance budget.</td>
<td>Open Space Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Services &amp; Ops</td>
<td>Increasing information available on ability of vegetation to reduce nuisance flooding, to reduce pavement and pipe damage, to capture rain and stormwater for irrigation.</td>
<td>Engineering Services &amp; Ops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Sets priority end uses for captured stormwater to reduce flow damage to waterways. Eg: parks where irrigation reduce health impacts, trees where floods happen.</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>More information available to help plan and design vegetation in all reserves for their key urban forest function (shade, habitat, flood, community etc.). Coordinated community messaging.</td>
<td>Open Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Design</td>
<td>Whole city perspective on vegetation to identify priority precincts and communities. More information available to help plan vegetation in all reserves for their key urban forest function (shade, habitat, flood, community etc.). Coordinated community messaging.</td>
<td>Urban Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Planning</td>
<td>Reduced car use if priority destination walking routes are sheltered for walking. True value of trees better recognised to support path design with tree planting.</td>
<td>Transport Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity</td>
<td>Support of remnant and revegetation sites. Support of pollinator pathways. Reduce reactive removing of trees (based more on fear than evidence). Better monitoring.</td>
<td>Biodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Management</td>
<td>Support of carbon neutral and climate change objectives. Local connection to environment and nature helps connect to bigger biosphere concerns.</td>
<td>Environmental Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Agriculture</td>
<td>More opportunities for food growing and connections linking people and land. Increased food and habitat for urban pollinators.</td>
<td>Urban Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Services</td>
<td>True value of trees increasingly recognised which supports tree planting within carparking areas. Coordinated community messaging.</td>
<td>Parking Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste &amp; Urban Agriculture</td>
<td>The benefit of composting more organic waste is to make soil healthier to support a healthier urban forest. Urban forests incorporate urban agriculture holistically.</td>
<td>Waste &amp; Urban Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
<td>Strategy and evidence will support upcoming review of Municipal Strategic Statement. True value of trees and vegetation can be incorporated into housing program.</td>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Services</td>
<td>More vegetation supports outdoor leisure via more shelter, reduced air &amp; water pollution.</td>
<td>Leisure Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged &amp; Disability</td>
<td>Increased vegetation supports outdoor leisure via more shelter and reduced air and water pollution. Vegetation is to complement path design for mobility aids.</td>
<td>Aged &amp; Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Planning</td>
<td>Draw on aboriginal knowledge and culture to inform urban forest planning and care.</td>
<td>Community Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Dev.</td>
<td>Vegetation increases economic viability of retail strips and reduces utility costs.</td>
<td>Economic Dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset Management</td>
<td>True value of vegetation increasingly recognised which supports maintenance budget. Grey infrastructure put in perspective with green infrastructure.</td>
<td>Asset Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>True value of vegetation recognised and increasing reflected in financial systems.</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Reduced liability and insurance claims through greater design, maintenance, monitoring.</td>
<td>Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>Greater vegetation data incorporated into GIS system for more knowledge sharing.</td>
<td>GIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Delivery of multiple Council objectives via one program. Efficiencies of budget, resources.</td>
<td>Executive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**External Stakeholders – Sample List**

**Better Best Practice Note – Urban Forest Stakeholder Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Connections with an Urban Forest program</th>
<th>Likely Stakeholder Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Councillors</td>
<td>Policy direction of Urban Forest Strategy supports multiple city objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council staff</td>
<td>Integration of procedures for best program application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X regional group/s</td>
<td>Links to multiple xxx strategies for growing, liveable and sustainable city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State waterway manager</td>
<td>Improved waterway health and integrated water management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water retailers</td>
<td>Increased recycled water commitments to reduced potable water reliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State parks manager</td>
<td>A wider context to support regional parklands and link with communities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x industry group/s</td>
<td>Links to advocacy, engagement and information program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local educational campuses</td>
<td>Tertiary, secondary, primary and vocational education campuses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local hospitals</td>
<td>Connections to preventative and rehabilitation programs. Research links.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community groups</td>
<td>A wider context to support initiatives of revegetation, gardening groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterway care groups</td>
<td>Waterway health and access to support urban ecology &amp; culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident groups</td>
<td>Opportunities for urban forest to help maintain urban character.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth community</td>
<td>Provide different perspective on urban vegetation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local indigenous community</td>
<td>Provide knowledge and links to country in recognition of traditional and current living Aboriginal culture in the city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural community</td>
<td>Provide different knowledge and perspective on urban vegetation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All abilities community</td>
<td>Provide different knowledge and perspective on urban vegetation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>