

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Building Partnerships with Stakeholders is the ability to build long-term or on-going relationships with stakeholders (e.g. someone who shares an interest in what you are doing). This type of relationship is often quite deliberate and is typically focused on the way the relationship is conducted. Implicit in this competency is demonstrating a respect for and stating positive expectations of the stakeholder.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultivating useful contacts with a broad range of people in a variety of strategic positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • networking without a purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making a conscious effort to understand differences and establish common interests with stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making contact with stakeholders only when you need to solve a problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a network of support with stakeholders to help attain organizational goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contacting stakeholders only when you need to gather information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building trusting and productive relationships with stakeholders in order to address future opportunities for the organization/government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limiting your involvement to updates and receipt of additional work assignments relative to your department's mandate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining a clear and in-depth understanding of the direction and intent of the stakeholder's mandate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being caught off guard by a changing need or focus or understanding the mandate at a "superficial" level only
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking a real interest in sharing information with the stakeholder in areas of personal expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only providing information when asked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributing to shaping the mandate for future governmental initiatives with your stakeholders; having them come to you for further insight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • telling your stakeholders that your opinion and ideas are always the best ones and the only ones to consider

Level 1-2 Activities

Identify someone who is known as having strong Building Partnerships with Stakeholders skills.

- Once you have identified a person who has strong relationship building skills observe them in an interaction with a key stakeholder.
- Take notes on what you see and after the interaction, ask them questions to understand their thinking behind the actions they took.
 - ⇒ What did they say to the stakeholder?
 - ⇒ What did they do?
 - ⇒ How did the stakeholder react?
 - ⇒ How did they anticipate the stakeholder's needs?
 - ⇒ How were the stakeholder's expectations met?
- Discuss with the person the techniques and approaches they used to ensure you understand how the stakeholder's needs were met.
- Discuss how to look for opportunities and anticipate the issues or concerns your stakeholders are facing.

Reflection Tip:

- * What outcomes do you see this individual benefiting from because of certain relationships? Be sure to understand how the individual decided they wanted to build this relationship in the first place.

Initiate informal contacts. Join an association or charitable group or become involved in a community activity.

- Initiate informal contacts outside of the office (e.g., home, out-door activities, clubs), with individuals from your area or other Ministries or organizations at least once a month.
- Introduce yourself to at least one new person each time you meet.
- Set goals for yourself to establish good levels of trust and rapport, and at the same time, learn more about your own or other organizations.
- Keep a written record of what you learn.

Reflection Tip:

- * Keep track of the people you are meeting and the information you are gathering. Reflect on what you bring to each relationship, as well as the reasons you might be interested in building a stronger relationship with this person.

Ask your peers for feedback on how you build relationships and partnerships.

- Tell your peers what you've done with key individuals, how it's worked, and how you felt about it.
- Ask for their input, and ongoing feedback.

Reflection Tip:

- * Choose peers that you feel are particularly well connected, and politically astute.

Learn as much as you can about your stakeholders' needs.

- Research prior mandates that are related to your current mandate and uncover the similarities/differences.
- Share your findings with your stakeholders in an effort to build a meaningful exchange and grow or enhance your partnership.
- Learn as much as you can about your contacts within specific stakeholder organizations. Interact with them professionally and socially as appropriate.

Reflection Tip:

- * Consider the impact building a partnership with your stakeholders can have.

Assess the quality of your knowledge of the stakeholder's organization.

- Over a one-month period, keep a log of the frequency and type (formal or informal) of contacts you make with your stakeholders.
- Review the log and assess whether there are opportunities to increase your availability and the frequency or level of stakeholder contact. In particular, take note if you are making the kind of informal contact that lets your stakeholders know you are thinking of them, have familiarity with their broader needs, and are available to help meet those needs and are 'on top of things'.
- Set a goal for yourself to increase the amount of time you spend in stakeholder-related activities that increase your knowledge of their broader mandate. Monitor your progress and set new goals each month.

Reflection Tip:

- * Do you know what your stakeholders value?

Take an inventory of your multiple stakeholders, groups, associations and any other business contacts that you have, and consider how frequently you contact them.

- Set up a schedule to maintain regular contact with those who are key influencers.

- Regularly attend networking luncheons, dinners, seminars, discussion forums, etc., at least once a quarter.
- Regularly ask yourself “who did I see today that gave me some useful information about what is going on in the organization?” Stay in touch with that person on a regular basis.
- Regularly engage your stakeholders in discussions about common policy issues.
- Contact your stakeholders to keep informed about issues of mutual interest, and to solicit their input.

Try to understand your stakeholder's point of view.

- After an interaction with a stakeholder, put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what they were feeling or thinking during your interaction with them.
- Think about how what you did influenced that person in either a positive or negative fashion.
- Write down what you would do differently next time to make the interaction more positive or effective.
- Use that information to develop a plan for the next time you interact with that stakeholder.

Reflection Tip:

- * Ask your peers about the methods they use to better understand their stakeholders' viewpoints.

Identify new partnerships that could improve the quality of your service mandate with your stakeholders.

- Brainstorm a list of potential stakeholders or partners. Rank them in terms of involvement with your organization and identify what type of involvement you currently have.
- Identify organizations where it would be strategic to build/enhance your relationship.
- Take the time to select a new partnership where you feel there will be the biggest payback. Both parties need to gain so that the overall mandate is best served and mutual goals achieved.

Level 3-4 Activities

Be visible, accessible and stay in contact with your stakeholders.

- Find ways to keep in regular contact with your stakeholders or their contacts, even when you are not directly servicing them on a current mandate (i.e., your deliverable may have been met but you've come across some information that would be useful for them, share it).

Offer a broader perspective.

- Give your stakeholder the benefit of your knowledge, and your expertise, to help them sort out their issues, concerns, challenges.
- Be an informal source of benchmark or best practices information for your stakeholder.
- Let them know about organizational trends without betraying any confidential information.

Reflection Tip:

- * Add value to your relationships with stakeholders.

Improve your relationship with a specific stakeholder.

- Set a goal to have at least one conversation each week with the person - not including business discussion.
- The conversation can include outside interests, family, sports, whatever interests you.
- Focus on learning more about the person, not their job.

Serve as an ongoing resource for your stakeholders.

- Every time you read an article or book, or come into contact with information you find interesting or useful, ask yourself if any of your stakeholders might be interested in the same information.
- Make copies of the information and pass it along with a short note to those who might be interested.
- Use following up on the information as an opportunity to chat with these stakeholders and obtain additional information about what is going on with them.

Reflection Tip:

- * Take note of the reactions these actions generate. Some individuals will be more responsive than others.

Conduct client conferences with your stakeholders.

- Sponsor a seminar or client conference that addresses topics and issues that concern stakeholders.
- Spend time with each stakeholder to identify their issues and concerns, and then design and coordinate appropriate activities to address those concerns.
- Organize the conference in a manner that maximizes stakeholder involvement.

Spend time talking with your peers about individuals who are good at Building Partnerships with Stakeholders.

- Use real life examples of excellence, describing the skills and behaviours the person demonstrated.
- Talk about the value of Building Partnerships with Stakeholders to the Ministry of Forests.
- Describe how Building Partnerships with Stakeholders makes a difference to your success.
- Identify and discuss the consequences of not anticipating stakeholder needs and issues and of not having good Building Partnerships with Stakeholders skills.
- Determine how your peers identify partnership building opportunities in the first place.

Reflection Tip:

- * The key to this exercise is to figure out what motivates individuals to initiate and develop their relationships and partnerships.

Follow these steps to begin to develop relationships with key stakeholders.

- Identify 3-5 stakeholders with whom you would like to develop a relationship.
- Find way to keep in regular contact with those individuals.
- Learn as much as you can about that individual's organization, job, and other personal interests as appropriate. Make a note of this information.
- Make a point of speaking to these individuals about their business needs, keeping in mind what you have learned.

Reflection Tip:

- * Be sure to note how this changes the dynamic of the meeting or interaction.

Analyze your stakeholder's situation and work with them to develop strategies they can use to be successful.

- Help key stakeholders to be more effective in their organization messages by offering the benefit of your insights and experience.
- Conduct an independent analysis of the stakeholder's situation. For example, identify what is happening versus what should be happening.
- Identify options the stakeholder could employ to be successful going forward.
- Weigh the value of each (for example, potential outcomes, cost of implementation, resources required, time to implement, etc.).

- Identify the pros and cons of each option and identify contingency plans to address potential obstacles in implementation. Determine whether it is better to do this analysis independently or in partnership with the stakeholders.

Identify potential strategic partnerships with stakeholders.

- Bring colleagues together to generate a list of stakeholders that your organization interacts with.
- Rank order the list in terms of how strategic the relationships are to the organization.
- Identify the current relationships with these stakeholders.
- Identify stakeholders with whom it would be strategic to build new relationships or expand existing relationships.
- Build an accountability framework for this plan.

Reflection Tip:

- * Are you doing all that you can to connect with your stakeholders?

Level 5 Activities

Represent your stakeholder and position yourself as a resource for them.

- Be your stakeholders' voice in the government. Represent your stakeholders' issues, concerns, and needs within your own organization, and take rapid action to resolve them.
- See yourself as someone who can help your stakeholders' businesses or service mandates. Looking at your job this way will change your interactions from transactions to partnerships.
- Be a resource for your stakeholders. Provide them with useful information and recommendations that help them understand what it all means for them.

Reflection Tip:

- * Are you doing all that you can to understand the needs of your stakeholders?

Identify your key stakeholders' critical issues and assumptions about the future.

- Talk to stakeholders on a regular basis about issues facing them, trends affecting them, and concerns they have about the future.
- Ask them to share their strategic plans, and the assumptions their plans are based upon.

- Summarize common themes you hear and report these back to your colleagues and supervisor.
- Discuss your findings with your colleagues and supervisor to incorporate their impressions into the critical issues facing the stakeholder.
- Work with your colleagues and supervisor to discuss what, if anything, you can do to help your stakeholders address these issues.
- Communicate your ideas to your stakeholders for their feedback.

Work to become a trusted advisor to your stakeholders.

- Discuss the options you've identified with the stakeholder(s).
- Offer the perspective of your thinking and share your experiences around situations you have faced in the past.
- Offer to coach the stakeholder in how to implement their chosen option successfully.
- Maintain the relationship by conducting ongoing coaching and serving as a sounding board for the stakeholder(s).

Build an operational culture in your organization that supports building and nurturing strategic partnerships.

- Regularly review and discuss current relationships/ partnerships with stakeholders.
- Talk about the importance of building and maintaining strong working partnerships with stakeholders. Use examples from within government and from the private sector.
- At staff meetings have peers/employees talk about the positive impact that strong partnerships can have on achieving organization objectives.
- Reward and recognize employees who build strong partnerships.

Reflection Tip:

- * Are partnerships valued in your organization?