Section 7: Stakeholder Engagement

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential to a well-balanced HIA. Whenever possible, the HIA should be integrated with stakeholder meetings held by the proponent and the lead federal agency, as well as the environmental and social review teams. The HIA team should avoid creating separate stakeholder engagement processes. For smaller projects it may be reasonable to rely on established public notice and commenting protocols.

Who are stakeholders? Stakeholders are persons or groups who are affected by a project, as well as those who may have interests in a project or the ability to influence its outcome. Stakeholders may include locally affected communities or individuals, their formal and informal representatives, national or local government authorities, politicians, religious leaders, civil society organizations, special interest groups, the academic community, or third-party businesses. The term ‘stakeholder” has broadened over time and includes any interested parties, regardless of their location or their direct contact with the project.

The objectives of stakeholder engagement and public participation include

- Obtaining public input on the nature of health risks and benefits posed by the project, and possible locally-relevant solutions;
- Ensuring that the analysis of potential impacts proceeds in a publicly transparent and unbiased manner;
- Obtaining information regarding local and traditional knowledge, scientific data, and other sources of information that may be available to contribute to a more complete HIA; and
- Building trust and collaboration between stakeholders.

The HIA should be conducted in a publicly transparent manner, with appropriate opportunity for public comment on:

- The scope of concerns to be addressed;
- Projected impacts on public health;
- Potential mitigation measures; and
- Monitoring and evaluation parameters.

The public participation process should be coordinated so that relevant health issues are integrated into the overall environmental/social process. Every effort should be made to avoid duplicative community meetings as stakeholders can experience “consultation fatigue” just as easily as “survey fatigue.”

Cultural Considerations

Timing is essential to avoid conflicts with subsistence activities and other community events. Careful coordination can enable attendance and participation in most cases. Participation is greater when planners make attendance as convenient and enjoyable for
the community as possible – providing food, door prizes and child care can enhance attendance at meetings.

**Participation**

The overall project stakeholder engagement plan must be a coordinated effort and should outline the overall strategy and approximate timelines. The geographic isolation of rural Alaskan communities, language barriers, seasonal subsistence activities, and the sheer number of small communities affected by large projects can frustrate efforts to coordinate meetings. Summer is a very challenging time for meeting with rural communities because many have departed for fishing or hunting opportunities. Winter can create daunting transportation challenges in remote Alaska. Often, the shoulder seasons just prior to summer and just before winter are good times to coordinate visits with rural Alaskan communities. When the HIA is performed by an agency the existing public noticing and meeting process used for the environmental/social impact assessment should accommodate HIA needs.

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_The stakeholder engagement process should be coordinated so that health issues are captured as part of the overall engagement process._