



CREATING A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Originally developed by: [FIT4FOOD2030](#)

OBJECTIVE

Develop a plan engaging various stakeholders for your project

TARGET AUDIENCE

Project coordinators, Living Labs, coordinators of food initiatives, policy-makers

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Consultation

TIME NEEDED

Several days over a period of 2-3 months, yet regular updates are needed afterwards

LIST OF MATERIALS

Attached template

CONTACT PERSON

Athena institute, VU Amsterdam
secretariaat.athena.beta@vu.nl

QUICK OVERVIEW

This tool guides you in creating a stakeholder engagement plan, helping you map out who needs to be involved in your project, their level of influence, and how best to engage them. By categorizing stakeholders based on their interest and influence, you can develop targeted strategies to keep everyone informed, involved, or consulted as needed. It is a structured way to ensure that all relevant voices are heard and to foster smoother collaboration.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Identify different types of stakeholders and understand their roles and influence in the project.
- Assess each stakeholder's level of interest and influence, using this to tailor your engagement approach.
- Develop strategies for involving stakeholders effectively, whether they need to be consulted frequently, kept in the loop, or simply informed.
- Create a clear, organized plan that outlines stakeholder roles and engagement tactics to support project success and collaboration.



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Creating a stakeholder engagement plan

After having identified and analysed the different stakeholders (see separate tool on '[Stakeholder analysis](#)'), you also need to convince them to be part of the project, lab or other initiative (hereafter called 'project') and to invest time in the project and to make sure that you keep them engaged. In this light it is important to think about the perspective of the stakeholders that you have identified. Which groups are already very active around food system transformation and/or within the research and innovation fields? And which groups are almost never represented? Which groups could 'make or break' your project? These types of questions provide you some insight in the level of engagement you may expect at the start of your collaboration and provide you with strategies how to maintain or improve the level of engagement (read further Figure 2).

When trying to involve different stakeholders, be aware that the reason why you would like them to take part in the network might not necessarily be a driver for them to join. It is therefore important to think in advance about the interests of the stakeholder; why would they engage in your project, what's in it for them? Try to connect to the goals of the stakeholder. This may also influence the way you approach or invite stakeholders to participate in the project. Keep in mind that stakeholder engagement is a continuous process: people may change jobs or priorities, so you might have to reassess how to engage a person or organisation along the way.

In this document we present several steps which you can use to interact with your stakeholders:

- Characterize your stakeholders according to relationship/interest and influence/power
- Manage the involvement of different stakeholders based on the previous characterization
- Develop empathy for the various stakeholders to be engaged in your project and/or ease the process of getting in touch with them (particular focus on stakeholder groups you are less familiar with)
- Create a connection between personal drives and transformation

Characterizing your stakeholders

Duration: Approximately 8 hours

Objective: To characterize each stakeholder according to relationship/interest and influence/power

The key characteristics to understand for each stakeholder are (1) their relationship to (interest in) a project, and (2) their influence (power) on the project. How these two characteristics interact will also determine how you should approach a stakeholder.

Five Levels of Stakeholders

Various stakeholders can have different relationships to a food system transformation process, ranging from taking a leading role to being unaware of the process. We outline these levels below:

- **Leading:** A leading stakeholder is aware of the project's impact and is actively involved.
- **Supporting:** A supporting stakeholder is aware of the project's impact and supports the project.
- **Neutral:** A neutral stakeholder is aware of the project's impact but neither resists nor supports the project.
- **Resistant:** A resistant stakeholder is aware of the project's impact but resists change.
- **Unaware:** An unaware stakeholder doesn't know about the project or its impact.

Let's take an example of a food system transformation exhibition:

- A **leading stakeholder** might be an exhibition host who is actively deploying the exhibition and implementing supporting content.
- A **supporting stakeholder** might be an organization aiding the deployment of the exhibition through consultation and training.
- A **neutral stakeholder** might be a ministry under which the exhibition host is implementing the exhibition.
- A **resistant stakeholder** might be a social group opposing the message of the exhibition.
- Finally, an **unaware stakeholder** could be a citizen who doesn't know about the exhibition taking place.

Scale of Stakeholder Influence (High, Medium, Low)

Stakeholders can have varying levels of influence on a project:

- **High-influence stakeholders** can make decisions that impact the project and other actors.
- **Medium-influence stakeholders** can be part of the decision-making process.
- **Low-influence stakeholders** have little control over decisions and are not always consulted. It is not always the case that a stakeholder has both high influence and high interest in a process. These characteristics can interact in different ways, as shown in Figure 1.

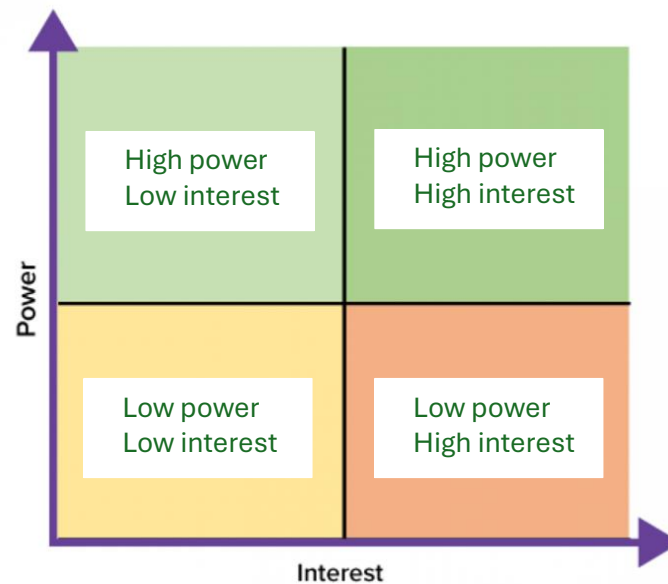


Figure 1: Power-interest grid

For example:

- A **high-interest, high-influence stakeholder** might be a national food quality advocacy group.
- A **low-interest, high-influence stakeholder** could be a national ministry of agriculture, nature, or food.

It is crucial to discuss the results of your analysis with others, either to see whether particular stakeholders are overlooked or to verify assumptions taken regarding their characteristics. One option is to organise a stakeholder brainstorm session. How to organise such a session is elaborated in a separate tool on '[Stakeholder analysis](#)'.

Depending on the political situation, the roles of stakeholders may change. Therefore, it is important to consider the local context when analysing and engaging with stakeholders and to regularly update your characterisation.

How to engage different stakeholder groups

Duration: Approximately 1 hour per stakeholder category

Objective: Manage the involvement of stakeholders in the most appropriate way

To find the best strategies and tools to engage and communicate with each stakeholder (group), you need to manage their involvement in the most appropriate way depending on how active and influential they are. To help you, you can use a stakeholder engagement strategy matrix (see Figure 2), based on the power-interest grid as explained above.

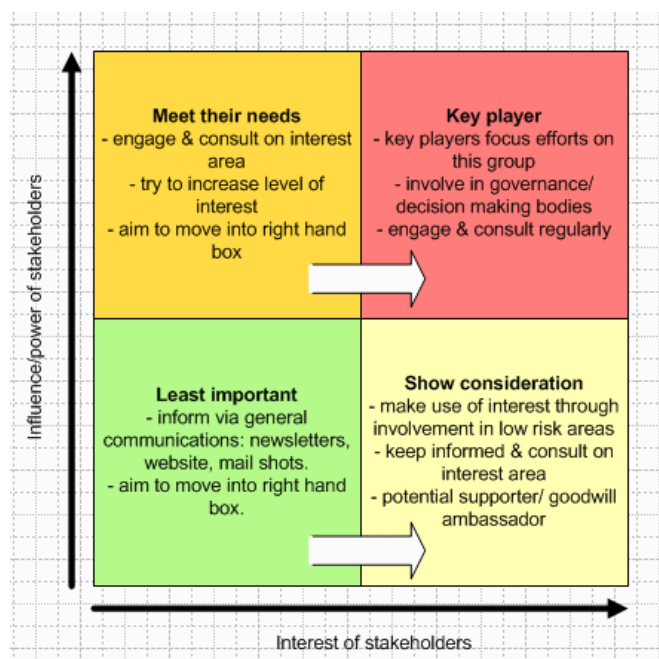


Figure 2: Stakeholder engagement strategy according to power and interest

Why Would They Want to Be Engaged?

It is important to consider the motivations of different stakeholders. Each stakeholder group may have specific reasons for participating in the process:

- **Activists** may be interested in expanding their network.
- **Policymakers** may aim to raise awareness of their initiatives.
- **Citizens** might value approachable and accessible learning opportunities.

Understanding the motivations of your target stakeholder group helps in tailoring content and strategies to meet their needs and interests effectively.

Stakeholder Role (Activity Participants, Contributors, Organisers)

Stakeholders can also be categorized by their role in the process. For instance, an exhibition promoting food system transformation should not be viewed as a single activity. Instead, it is a process involving various activities that engage different stakeholder groups:

- Some stakeholders may be **participants** (e.g., visitors to the exhibition).
- Others may act as **contributors** (e.g., those providing content or expertise).
- Some may serve as **organisers**, arranging additional side events as part of the exhibition.

These additional events can broaden engagement by attracting new stakeholders who might not be motivated by the primary exhibition but are drawn to related activities more relevant to their interests.

Certain groups who might not feel that they have a direct interest in the goal of your policy lab and/or have scarce resources can be challenging to reach. In the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs citizens, farmers and SMEs were experienced as ‘hard to get’ groups of stakeholders. You can use the tips & tricks to start thinking about how to familiarise yourself with these type of stakeholder groups, how to identify these groups and how to get and keep them involved.

EXAMPLE from a FIT4FOOD2030 policy lab:

In order to reach and engage a broad group of stakeholders from industry, the Romanian policy lab organized one of their early meetings back-to-back with a large food industry event.

Personas for stakeholder empathy development

Duration: ± 1 to 2 hours per stakeholder

Objective: Develop empathy for the various stakeholders to be engaged in a transformative network and/or ease the process of getting in touch with them.

This exercise uses Personas as a method for ‘empathizing.’ A Persona is a fictitious person that ‘summarizes’ a real group of individuals with specific characteristics (e.g., fishermen, biomedical researchers). A Persona’s purpose is to create a connection between the Persona-creator and the Persona. This differs from thinking in stereotypes, which are more about classifying people in a humoristic or cynical way. Alternatively, Personas should be created in a way that enables you, as a food system transformation facilitator, to feel empathy for them. Such empathy can help in the process of getting in touch with the stakeholder that the Persona represents, e.g., when inviting this stakeholder to your interactions or events. To make good Personas, it can be helpful to create them together with other stakeholders or people from your team.

Using the Persona Template (see Figure 3), Persona creation comprises the following steps:

- First, choose a stakeholder (or actor) with whom you are least familiar. Create a Persona for this stakeholder by filling out the template. Make this Persona in a way that allows you to feel a connection with it. Avoid making jokes or adopting a cynical stance towards this Persona during its creation.
- Write a letter/email (or create another means) to communicate with this Persona.
- Reflect on the following:
 - What would you tell her/him about your intended activities on transforming (R&I around) food systems?
 - What life interests or motives of the Persona can you appeal to?
 - What would you ‘ask from’ him/her?
 - What could you ‘offer’ him/her or provide in return?
 - In what way could the communication be more specifically oriented to this Persona in particular?

To justify or adjust the Persona, it can be useful to engage in a connection exercise with the stakeholder it represents and refine the Persona whenever necessary.

Name:

Age:

Profession:

Education:

Hometown:

Family:

Hobby's:

General interests:

Make a drawing of your persona

Possible ways of communication (Channels, means media etc.):

Life motto:

A day in the life of....:

Figure 3. [Persona Template](#)

An example of a Persona Template is provided in Figure 4.

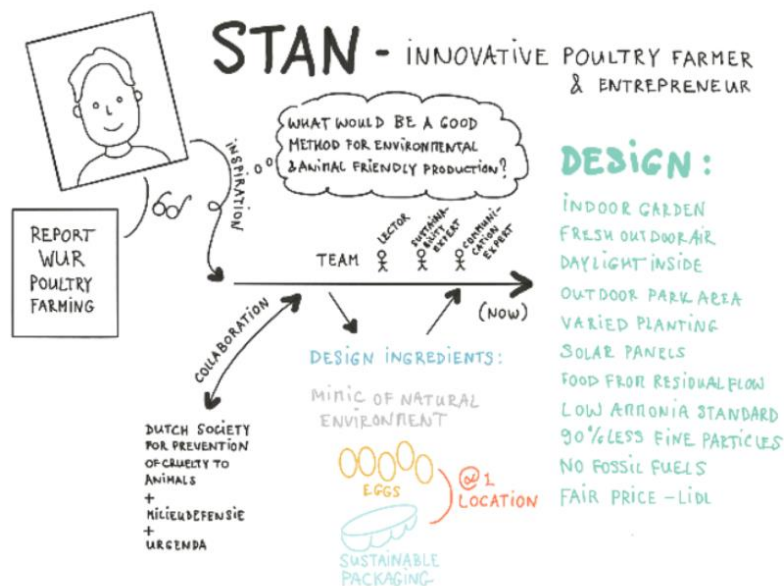


Figure 4: Persona Stan. Developed by the FIT4FOOD2030 project's City Lab Amsterdam.

Connecting to individual drives

Duration: ± 1 hour per stakeholder

Objective: Create a connection between personal drives and transformation

The idea of this exercise is to meet a (new) person with who(m) a connection is desirable, e.g. for the expansion of your network. Take this person for a walk, e.g. outside in a green area. Either interview this person, or engage in a dialogue about the following questions:

- Who am I / who are you?
- Why am I doing my work / why are you doing your work? (work motivation)
- What would I / you need to fully realize my / your work motivation?

It is advisable to let one person speak at a time; the listener does not necessarily have to ask questions. This allows more openness for what is actually being said (and little worries about which follow-up questions to pose). Furthermore, it is advisable to both look in the same direction / in front of you (and not in each other's eyes), to literally look at 'the future'. In case of rain, place two chairs in front of a window with a good view, and look outside (so you do not look in each other's eyes).

This exercise can also be done as a self-reflection exercise, e.g. by journaling for yourself. Such reflection can help change makers to keep their transformative network activities/ actions connected to themselves.

Designing a communication strategy

Duration: ± 1 hour per stakeholder

Objective: Develop a strategy for tailor-made communication with various stakeholders

Especially when it comes to multi-stakeholder events or processes, it is recommendable to operationalize the steps towards the (first) event with the help of the 5W+H principle (who, when, why, what, where, how). Figure 5 below is an example matrix that can be used to design a communication plan for (personal) stakeholder communication, a (multi-) stakeholder event or process, with specific attention to tailoring the communication with regard to each stakeholder separately.

WHO?	WHEN?	WHY? (OBJECTIVE)	HOW? (CHANNEL)	WHAT? (MESSAGE)

Figure 5: Example matrix that can be used to design a strategy for tailor-made communication with various stakeholders developed by the FIT4FOOD2030 project

The following steps can help to create a communication plan:

- With your stakeholder analysis and Persona(s) in mind, make a timeline with an overview of ‘who to contact when, with which means, to what goal, with which message’, etc.
- Write a letter to one stakeholder first. How do you introduce your connection with them? What information do you provide? What is the action you ask from this stakeholder? With this letter as a template, create letters for all the other stakeholders in the list. Adjust jargon and message sequence accordingly.
- Let one other person read the letter(s) before using it.
- Think about how to keep actor(s) ‘on board’ once connected and contacted.