

Community Profiling

Engagement range	Consult/Partnership
Difficulty level	Low to medium
Cost	Low (less than \$1,000) to Medium (\$1,000 - \$10,000)
When might you use it	To develop community capacity To discover community issues To develop action plan To communicate an issue To build alliances, consensus
Number of people required to help to organise	One to three, depends on the audience size and level of complexity
Size of audience	Small (under 10) Medium (up to 30) Large (over 30)
Time to organise	Medium (Six weeks to six months) to long (6-12 months)
Issues/resources to think about	Profile Coordinator (to manage the above tasks); Social research texts; Social research advisors (to assist in development of the method); Publicity; Statistical resources (i.e. ABS Community Profiles)
Innovation level	Low to medium

Description

Community (or stakeholder) profiles are a useful way of developing an understanding of the people in a geographical area or a specific community of interest. This understanding can assist in the development of a community engagement plan and influence who the key stakeholder groups are and how a project develops.

Profiles can illustrate the makeup of a community and could include information about the diversity within the community, their history, social and economic characteristics, how active people are (i.e. the groups and networks used) and what social and infrastructure services are provided.

A community profile can also provide information on the level of interest community members may have in being actively involved in a project and their preferred method of engagement.

Objectives

- To develop a more in-depth understanding of a community of interest.

Desired Outcome

- Projects tailored to the needs and characteristics of the people involved.

Uses/Strengths

- A profile is an effective way of gathering information about the diversity of a community and the potential stakeholders that may otherwise not be recorded.
- Profiles can highlight the gaps in our understanding of a community or different stakeholders and therefore guide future research.
- Profiles can encourage broader thinking about 'who' a community is and 'who' is involved in a project and 'how'.
- Profiles can help determine who is likely to be influenced by change or affected by a project.
- Developing a profile can be used as a means to develop relationships in a community/stakeholder group as the understanding is researched and developed together.
- The process of profiling can in itself raise awareness, interest and build the capacity of members in the community.
- Profiles are a means to gather community intelligence over time as projects develop and therefore this info can be easily passed on.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Community profiling is in itself an engagement activity. People involved in profiling need to be clear about why it is occurring and what will happen with the information that is collected (i.e. privacy laws).
- Communities are often complex and over time a rich and diverse picture may develop. It is important to think about how such information will be collected, managed and presented in order to prevent 'information overload'.
- Some of the most interesting questions to ask about a community can be the most expensive/time intensive to research.

Step by Step Guide

1. Scoping
 - 1.1 What is the purpose of the community profile for the overall project?
 - 1.2 How will the community profile assist the overall project?
 - 1.3 What information needs to be in the community profile?
 - 1.4 How will the community profile information be used?
 - 1.5 Who will be involved in the development of the profile?
 - 1.6 What resources/constraints will influence the development of the profile?
2. Develop a research proposal
 - 2.1 What are the key questions to be researched by the profiler?
 - 2.2 What research approach will be taken?
 - 2.3 What methods will be used?
 - 2.4 Estimate the time/cost for development.
3. Endorsement: Who needs to endorse/support the development of the profile?
4. Research Activity
 - 4.1 How will the information be collected and recorded?
 - 4.2 How will privacy issues be managed?
5. Presentation of profile to project team/community
6. Production of profile document
 - 6.1 Will the profile be added to over time as more understanding is developed?
 - 6.2 Who will be responsible for the profile?