



**MELBOURNE
SCHOOL OF
GOVERNMENT**



Next Generation Engagement
**Informing community
engagement for Australia's
infrastructure sector**

RESEARCH PRIORITIES SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2017

Contributing to the Next Generation of community engagement

We are excited to present the top five research priorities of the Next Generation Engagement Project, Australia's largest national study into community engagement in infrastructure to date.

This report represents the expertise, experience and advice of over 200 individuals working in community engagement, government, peak industry bodies, institutional investors, project planners and proponents, sector recruitment and civil society.

The seed of this project formed when we came together as a small group of community engagement practitioners and researchers who found ourselves asking a shared question:

How can we do community engagement better to deliver the infrastructure we need more efficiently and with better outcomes for impacted communities?

The Next Generation Engagement project pilot study took this question direct to industry. Through deep and challenging conversations with community engagement practitioners, our colleagues at universities across Australia and the input of peak professional bodies internationally,

we probed the gap between best practice community engagement and on-ground experiences. To do this, we presented industry with a 'Situation Analysis' that posed a number of critical questions, such as:

- > Why do we start with best practice strategies but end up shifting to 'declare and defend' mode during delivery?
- > What are the costs and benefits of engagement at various points and how can best return on investment be achieved, for all parties?
- > Are our existing methods of engagement sufficient for current and future generations?
- > What are the metrics we should use to demonstrate the impact of social risk and community engagement on project schedule, budget and scope?
- > How can we better share this data among projects to develop an industry-wide performance 'baseline' and reduce 'consultation fatigue' in communities?

- > What is the earliest point at which engagement is likely to be most meaningful and most effective, for all parties concerned?

We found raging agreement that these are timely and critical questions to be addressed by research for the sector. Over the past nine months, our partners and participants helped us to test assumptions about current policy and practice, refine key questions and define five priority research themes.

The 'co-design' method used to identify the priority research themes introduced in this report represents the research future of industry-government-civil society collaboration. The process applied shared industry experience and research perspectives as diverse as urban planning, economics, social and policy science, psychology and engineering, to arrive at an agreed understanding of the areas in which a robust, shared evidence base could drive improved decision-making and value creation.



The co-design process involved:

- a national survey of professionals working in infrastructure (n = 123)
- a national series of seven co-design workshops in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth (over 180 participants)
- delivery of a draft 'Research Priorities Summary' to partners
- follow-up workshops with partner organisations to feedback and shape the draft report (32 participants)
- presentation of draft findings at key industry events to seek feedback e.g. Engage2Act Unconference, IAP2, AIPM (over 100 workshop participants).
- an open national commentary period on the draft report.

Participants told us that they need a solid evidence base to better articulate

the value of engagement, social risk and social license; and that this evidence base needs to be widely understood and shared amongst industry. Participants focused on the importance of measurement and generation of metrics for clearly evaluating the value of engagement for project delivery and for the project environment.

We know that the demands of a highly intensive period of infrastructure delivery will require an increasing number of progressively skilled community engagement practitioners. Supporting the professionalisation of community engagement through identification of core skills and capabilities, career pathways and creation of tertiary qualifications was identified by participants as a critical need for the industry, nationally and globally.

Participants also identified three cross-cutting trends shaping the next generation of community engagement:

- digitisation and social media
- cumulative impacts
- resilience.

The Next Generation Engagement project strongly demonstrates the appetite and need for a shared, industry-wide evidence base to address the themes and cross-cutting trends identified in the pilot study.

This Research Priorities Summary distils the key findings related to these themes and sets out the central issues and research questions to be addressed through an international program of research. The full research report is available at: <http://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/nextgenengagement>.

Thank you to all of our project partners and to those who contributed to the first stage of our nation-wide conversation about what community engagement means for infrastructure project planning and delivery, and what can be done to realise its potential.

Five priority research themes

Our findings suggest that there are five priority research themes vital to addressing the gap between best community engagement principles and on-ground practice. Each of these themes is tied to a vision for the next generation of community engagement:



1. **Value:** Community engagement becomes better understood and more valued by project proponents and policymakers, including its potential to contribute to community resilience and to realise broader project and community benefits.



2. **Measurement:** Better measures and understanding of socio-cultural risks are generated and employed alongside traditional risk measures, supporting sound investment decisions and more accurate contingency pricing.



3. **Timing & Approaches:** Community engagement approaches and timing align with project types and risks. Engagement commences from problem definition and informs business case and concept development.



4. **Professionalisation:** Community engagement becomes a better recognised profession, supported by tertiary and other qualifications and a rigorous evidence base to support decision making.



5. **Regulation & policy:** Regulation and policy to support best practice community engagement is efficient and facilitates the acceptance of community engagement into project selection, planning and delivery, to a similar degree as safety.

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Project background and aims

The Next Generation Engagement project comes at a time when Australia's infrastructure sector is thriving. Current estimates show an unprecedented \$100 billion program of infrastructure projects underway.

The 2017/18 Federal budget committed \$70 billion to transport infrastructure projects across Australia to 2020/21. And that's just the public sector projects.

The prioritisation of infrastructure is driven largely by a level of population growth that is faster than peer nations, including the United States, Canada and the UK.¹

For Infrastructure Australia, this prioritisation is about 'the user – the commuter waiting for the train, the family paying their electricity bill and the business looking to capitalise on overseas markets'.²

For Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, a focus on infrastructure growth represents commitments made to tax payers, work to support strong future economies and efforts to ensure Australia offers a world-leading quality of life.

Australia is not alone in its strong demand for infrastructure. World-wide, population growth is driving increasing requirements for new and upgraded energy, water, transport, housing and social infrastructure. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that \$57 trillion is needed in global infrastructure investment between 2013 and 2030 simply to keep pace with demand.³ This is even before addressing glaring gaps in asset maintenance.

In order to deliver this infrastructure, strong community engagement is clearly a global priority. During the course of this pilot phase, we've heard this message loud and clear from participants throughout Australia at the IAP2 Australasia conference in Auckland, from researchers at EDHEC Infrastructure Institute, Singapore, and at the Second National Chinese Forum on Public-Private Partnerships, Beijing.

Meeting the global infrastructure challenge will require a progressively professionalised cohort of engagement specialists with the training, skills and capabilities necessary to identify and manage social risks, reduce project costs and optimise community benefits.

The time is ripe to deliver a robust, industry-led, shared evidence base to inform the future of community engagement for infrastructure project selection, planning and delivery.

The challenges industry has identified in the pilot study are complex, globally relevant and costly. No single institution holds the capacity to address these challenges alone. The Next Generation Engagement Project's vision is to secure the best Australian and international researchers to actively engage industry, government and civil society partners in a comprehensive research program.

From 2018, the Next Generation Engagement project



aims to establish an international research centre. Projects within the centre will address the five priority research themes outlined in this report and will provide evidence to inform policy and practice, such as:

- Improved infrastructure decision making, both in project selection and delivery, through a better understanding of engagement, social risk and social licence
- Improved investment attractiveness as improved social risk management reduces and prevents costly project delays and cancellations
- Validated models to manage or reduce social / non-technical risk
- Better use of local knowledge from the earliest stages of concept development to reduce social and technical risk
- Better understanding of the performance impact of different engagement timings and approaches, from as early as problem definition
- Improved efficiency of how the industry collects, shares and uses data, including historical data and previous consultations.



The infrastructure sector contributed 10.2% of GDP to the Australian economy in 2014-15

1. Infrastructure Australia. (n.d.). Infrastructure Australia Corporate Plan 2016-17 to 2019-20. Retrieved from: <http://infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/about/files/Infrastructure-Australia-Corporate-Plan-2016-17.pdf> 2.

2. Infrastructure Australia. (2016). Infrastructure Australia Plan; Priorities and reforms for our nation's future. Retrieved from: http://infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/policy-publications/publications/files/Australian_Infrastructure_Plan.pdf.

3. Dobbs, R., Pohl, H., Lin, D-Y., Mischke, J., Garemo, N., Hexter, J., Matzinger, S., Palter, R., & Nanavatty, R. (2013). Infrastructure Productivity: How to save \$1 trillion a year. Retrieved from: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure/our-insights/bridging-global-infrastructure-gaps>

Research methods overview

The first phase of the Next Generation Engagement project used a variety of methods to identify priority research areas for the sector. Findings highlighted here come primarily from the multidisciplinary National Practitioners' Workshop Series (workshops), detailed below. This work complemented data from preliminary interviews with a range of infrastructure industry professionals representing diverse interests and organisations and a national survey in which 123 practitioners shared their experiences. We also held a number of feedback workshops with partner organisations, to capture detailed advice. Workshops at leading national forums, including Engage2Act, IAP2 and the Australian Institute of Project Management annual conferences, also informed this report.

Each workshop in our series built on the results of the preceding workshops. This meant that as the series progressed, each group contributed to the activities, incorporating the input of their colleagues from prior workshops, as distilled by our research team. This supported an iterative co-design process where participants were able to engage, critique and improve upon the ideas of previous workshops. Research co-design activities in the workshop series included:

Defining foundations for research

- **Testing assumptions:** Participants were presented with a number of literature-based assumptions about community engagement practice and were asked to test, affirm or reject these assumptions, or offer new ones.
- **Asking the best questions:** Participants were presented with a number of literature-based research questions and asked to improve, change, remove or offer new or different questions.

Putting community engagement in context: Big picture

- **Systems thinking to create influence diagrams:** Participants received an abridged introduction to this method and worked individually and in pairs to identify the key factors and flows of influence affecting the quality of interactions between project proponents and communities. Our researchers analysed these diagrams to map a system of influences shaping contemporary community engagement (see full report for details).

Connecting timing and approaches: Detailed view

- **Mapping community engagement against major project phases:** Finally, participants were asked to consider how they work with other disciplines in project delivery and to map the main helpers and hindrances to achieving best practice community engagement across the four major project phases: problem definition, planning, delivery and closeout.

The findings summarised in the following sections represent this co-design process.

RESEARCH PHASES



- 1 Phase one:** National survey and desktop research (February to May 2017)
 - 2 Phase two:** Fieldwork: Partner launch events and National Practitioner Workshop series (May-June 2017)
 - 3 Phase three:** Analysis, circulation of draft report for partner comment and open national consultation (August-October 2017)
 - 4 Phase four:** National consultation completed, final report completed, national roadshow at industry forums to share key results (October-December 2017)
- 2018:** Major funding application to support the longer-term research program



Fresh thinking on sticky problems

The community engagement challenges and opportunities driving the Next Generation Engagement project represent 'sticky problems' for Australia's infrastructure sector; they have been around for some time and have proven difficult to shake. While these issues are long-standing, the current global and national context presents a unique and pressing opportunity to address them with fresh thinking.

Our 'Situation Analysis' and 'Expert Commentary Series' illustrated the relevance and importance of improving community engagement within the context of a thriving sector with more than \$100 billion in projects currently on the public books. Those analyses highlighted:



A global context that estimates a \$57 trillion infrastructure need to 2030 – delays need to be avoided to meet this need



The need to accommodate stakeholder input into shifting delivery models, including public-private partnerships



Current timings and approaches to community engagement may inhibit best practice



Recent, multi-billion dollar project delays or cancellations, influenced by community opposition



Increasing need for more sophisticated understanding of social risk and pricing



Project funding, approvals and oversight are increasingly politicised



Economic and wellbeing costs to infrastructure professionals in antagonistic delivery environments



Economic and wellbeing costs to communities, especially in terms of relationships and resilience



Opportunities for formal professionalisation of community engagement to enhance prioritisation and legitimacy remain limited

This context provided the launching pad for our investigations and the design of the five-point research agenda.

Why is community engagement such a sticky problem?

It is helpful to take a moment to consider the broader question raised by the priority research themes identified.

Why do these five particular challenges remain so difficult to budge or address, especially when they are widely acknowledged among community engagement and related professionals?

We found that, despite the many gains made by community engagement over the past two decades—in terms of acceptance as a vital component of project delivery, formalisation of roles, and growth in the number of individuals dedicated to the practice—community engagement continues to lack the recognition and influence of other project design and delivery disciplines. As workshop participants

stated, ‘Success is measured by “on-time and on-budget”, not services and community outcomes’.

Better understanding of community engagement’s value and integration into the entire project lifecycle will require a holistic approach to tackling community engagement challenges and optimising benefits. Or, as another workshop group put it, this will demand ‘industry leadership, knowledge sharing, consistency and efficiency.’

A key aim of the Next Generation Engagement project is to address these challenges through a transdisciplinary approach that breaks down professional and disciplinary silos to view these long standing challenges through new perspectives.

Defining the research themes

In the sections that follow, we set out the five priority research themes defined through the project and reinforced by the national consultation: values, measurement, regulation & policy, professionalisation and timing & approaches. For each of these themes we offer an overview of its content, highlight key challenges and opportunities, and raise key questions.



This icon is used throughout this report to highlight key research questions to be pursued in the next phases.



Industry's view: Challenges and opportunities for community engagement

Our research co-design process facilitated participants to identify key opportunities and challenges for the future of community engagement.

The research found that the following issues represent shared concerns across the industry:

- Need for shared data on the performance of completed projects and on how the approach to engagement impacts, stakeholder outcomes and project performance.
- Desire for a longer-term focus in decision-making, shifting a common focus on 'announceables' and 'on-time, on-budget delivery' towards long-term outcomes delivered by projects and the positive / negative net impact on the communities, customers and other stakeholders impacted by projects.
- Strong desire for improved understanding of community engagement as a professional discipline and better recognition within organisations and across the sector as to the value of community engagement, especially compared to more traditional, 'technical' disciplines such as engineering, project management and finance.

Participants also told us that:

- They lacked the tools to properly evaluate the impact of engagement on project performance and to communicate this impact to colleagues from other disciplines.
- Funding for engagement is typically less than 1% of project budget on major projects >\$1billion and generally resourcing only increases with community outrage (addressing costs incurred vs proactive cost avoidance).



- Engagement professionals often have no or very limited input into the contracts that shape the community and stakeholder performance of contractors and consultants.
- Stakeholder sentiment and social risk were given little weight in the early stages of project selection, development and funding.
- The industry needs tools to accurately price social risk and measure its impact.
- Projects are perceived as heavily politicised and planning approval processes are often seen by stakeholders as a rubber stamp, impacting the ability to deliver best practice engagement.
- Engagement practitioners are often absent from the senior leadership table and it remains unusual for them to progress through to roles, such as Project Director.
- Advanced training and education options for engagement professionals are needed, as the community engagement profession remains heavily experience based.
- Participants recognised that timing and approaches to engagement affect project performance and community outcomes but evidence is needed to identify the best timing or approaches for a particular project.
- Engagement could deliver greater value if it were incorporated into key decision-making processes around problem identification, potential solutions, route/site selection and preliminary project budgets.

"You can price a beam or a bridge, you can estimate the design life of an asset, but until we can deliver the same quantifiable data about engagement, we will never be on the same footing as disciplines like engineering or finance."

Workshop participant

Theme 1: Value

Research completed within the Value theme will advance the following aim:

Community engagement becomes better understood and more valued by project proponents and policymakers, including its potential to contribute to community resilience and to realise broader project and community benefits.

Defining the value of community engagement will require making social impacts more tangible. Or, as one participant suggested, ‘The Next Generation Engagement project for me really means that the industry and the practice that we have can become more than an art and closer towards being a science. We’ll have some real data, some real evidence, to back up what we know as practitioners’.

Key challenges and opportunities

Perceptions of value: Community engagement continues to lag disciplines such as engineering and finance in terms of its perceived value and consequent influence, despite being better integrated into project delivery now than ever before.

Findings demonstrate that community engagement faces a paradox in regards to this: Engagement is often scaled up to quell community opposition, an action that makes its value to a project explicit. Practitioners report that, were community engagement commenced earlier (i.e. prior to opposition solidifying) and better resourced or supported to pursue best practice, such events might not occur at all.

Perceptions about the need for community engagement appear driven by *costs incurred* due to community opposition. But engagement can also support *cost avoidance*, which is much harder to quantify and, therefore, value.

Working with stakeholders can also *create value* by identifying opportunities for innovation or benefits not immediately evident to the project team.



How can social costs and benefits be better measured and incorporated into a context in which the majority of costs and benefits are quantified and tangible?

‘Share the data’: Practitioners largely believe that better integration and valuing of community engagement could be driven by quantifying the social, political and risk-management value delivered.

An evidence base is needed at an industry level and requires sharing of data and case information.

Participants noted that although a large volume of data related to social licence exists, there is a distinct lack of shared data showing how engagement affects project performance. This is due partly to information being treated as commercial in confidence and also due to the need for a single organisation to assist with collecting, collating, treating (i.e. de-identifying) and analysing that data. The potential for better, applied use of ‘big data’, including social media data, was also noted.



How can the value of community engagement to project performance be better articulated? For example, to better explain its role in realising outcomes of intangible value, such as community resilience and goodwill?

Defining success: As workshop participants commented, ‘success is rarely defined in terms of community outcomes’. Findings related to ‘defining success’ indicate the importance of understanding the social, political and institutional cultures that influence community engagement and project delivery, more broadly.

An evidence base of this kind is needed at an industry level and requires sharing of data and case information.

Defining the value of community engagement relies heavily on improved measurement, especially in relation to social risk and its pricing. This priority is captured in our second research theme, ‘Measurement’.



To what extent does the politicisation of projects hinder best practice?



How can we better measure the return on investment in community engagement, especially in terms of costs avoided and value created? And how might this be incorporated into business case evaluation?



What evidence could shared data provide to support a shift in understanding about the value of community engagement? How might data-sharing be encouraged in a highly competitive environment and how might this reduce overhead costs??



Theme 2: Measurement

This theme focuses particularly on the concept of social risk, with the following aim:

Better measures and understanding of socio-cultural risks are generated and employed alongside traditional risk measures, supporting sound investment decisions and more accurate contingency pricing.

Participants consistently emphasised that the value propositions and evidence bases used to support engagement-related activities need to be better developed, understood and accepted. One workshop group suggested that community engagement practitioners need to 'talk the language they (e.g. engineers, project managers, financiers) talk', while another group said that engagement practitioners should 'use industry standards and methods (e.g. NPV) for evaluating community input'. Interestingly, most recommendations concerning measurement suggested that community engagement should adapt to existing methods, as opposed to encouraging other specialisations (e.g. engineering, finance) to adapt their own metrics and data to an engagement perspective.

Certain organisations are actively working to incorporate social risk assessment into concept development through early research and engagement. For example, project partner Building Queensland's Business Case Development Framework requires broad engagement by proponents. Similarly, Melbourne Water has introduced a process for including community engagement research as part of its planning for major infrastructure projects. Such project-focused research helps people to understand the purpose of the project, identifies gaps in knowledge, and pinpoints causes for community concern and construction impacts. New research can capture the lessons from these initiatives, while offering enriched methods and models.



How can a more holistic picture of project or sector risk terrain be mapped? For example, could global and national data on technical risk be incorporated into new social risk metrics? What comparative national or global studies could enhance this understanding?



What are the identifiable precursors of social risk and what measurable indicators could be developed to support improved identification of these risk factors?



Key challenges and opportunities

Measuring social risk: ‘Non-technical’ or ‘social’ risk is today widely accepted as a central consideration in project selection, planning, design and delivery. Yet measures of social risk lag those of technical and financial risk. This may be partly because social factors are consistently tagged as ‘soft’ or intangible, and are consequently viewed as too hard to measure.

Arguments against quantification of certain, social issues, such as cultural connection to land or human rights, also hold great validity. Not all factors worthy of consideration can be boiled down to cost-benefit. But many social risks can be quantified and new technologies, access to ‘big data’ and growing interest in improving understanding of social risk hold great potential.

Social risk metrics are needed and will provide greater value through improved understanding of the risk terrain.

Bigger and better data: Today’s access to information is unprecedented. Harnessing big data, such as social media content, presents an exciting means of facilitating better informed engagement.

Early studies in controversial industries are demonstrating that issues-identification and attitudinal measures are possible through big data analysis.

Emerging technologies hold the potential for real time social licence and social risk measurement, allowing for more targeted, rapid response.

A combination of these types of data and technologies could support early intervention to reduce fire fighting and assist more proactive engagement. Similarly, better sharing of data across projects would support better analysis of data.

Return on investment: Understanding the return on investment (RoI) in community engagement is directly related to earlier considerations raised about the practice’s value.

RoI and social return on investment (SRoI) address the systems dynamics identified through the research co-design, in which participants linked the quality of engagement to costs of community opposition.

Integrating research-derived RoI measures, including costs of conflict, social risk and value of social licence, with financial and technical risk measures could better identify the value of community engagement to projects and organisations.

Opportunities to link in with current international studies investigating financial RoI of infrastructure projects and investment risk criteria would support a more holistic understanding of the returns possible through best practice community engagement.



What can ‘big data’ tell us about community needs, concerns or attitudes to facilitate informed engagement and avoid ‘solutioneering’?



How can social risk be priced as a means of informing planning and investment decisions?



How could real time, mobile technology assist in better connecting communities to projects, or to measuring social risks, social licence or community well-being to facilitate stronger, more timely engagement?



How could improved or new community engagement measures help to track return on investment (RoI) across project types, scales and through the project lifecycle, from business case to closeout?



What are the actual costs of community engagement, relative to SRoI for dollars spent? What are the costs of poor or missing engagement, in terms of days delay or costs of conditioning? Conversely, what value is created when community engagement is well timed and well delivered?

Theme 3: Timing & approaches

The 'Timing & approaches' theme speaks to the *when* and *why* of engagement, with the aim of:

Aligning community engagement approaches and timing with project types and risks, supporting the incorporation of community engagement into business case assessment and contingency pricing.

Key challenges and opportunities

Risk profile/approach alignment:

Contributors to the research co-design represent some of Australia's most knowledgeable leaders in the field of community engagement. They regularly apply this experience to determine the best ways to engage particular communities. Findings suggest that substantial value could be gained however, from combining a better understanding of social risk profiles with the toolbox of community engagement approaches to allow for evidence-based, strategic matching between the two (without becoming overly prescriptive). If risk profiles and engagement approaches could be better aligned, this knowledge could also inform engagement planning and improved assessment of whether certain approaches are likely to be successful in particular situations.

Early engagement: The timing of engagement on a project proved to be a contentious issue in the consultation, signalling that it is an ideal topic for research. On the one hand, participants argued that 'too early can be problematic, a level of pre-work is required.' Others in favour of early engagement, however, suggested that stakeholders should be part of the conversation 'at the point of options analysis' and that stakeholders were 'not being involved early enough.' It was noted that engagement practitioners rarely have a significant role in preliminary risk assessment or business case development and participants suggested this contributed to the lack of consideration of socio-political risk as part of project design. Questions about whether engaging too early would lead to greater community comfort or stoke concerns were also prominent when discussing the timing of engagement. Evidence-based advice could assist in determining when is the best stage to engage based on the social risk profile of a given project.

 How could new and better social risk metrics contribute to the choice of community engagement approaches for particular projects/situations?

 Could better pairing of social risk profiles and engagement approaches lead to improved community outcomes, reduced project costs, or both?

Lifecycle integration: Findings also suggest that community engagement needs to be better integrated throughout the project lifecycle. In certain instances, contributors suggested that late mobilisation or premature winding back of the engagement team from a project resulted in lost value and increased costs. Findings indicate that there is often a lack of program budget allocated to the problem definition and closeout phases, with the latter resulting in a lost opportunity for potential lessons learned to be captured and shared or lack of benefits realised. Participants suggested that evaluation of engagement can be a particularly helpful component of lifecycle integration, capturing 'lessons learned aligned to best practice engagement methods.' Lifecycle integration of community engagement into a project was also seen as a means of 'closing the loop' and helping to maintain a sense of community ownership and connectedness to a project. Or, as one workshop group put it, 'We asked, you said, we did.'

 What costs are incurred or value gained based on the timing of community engagement entry/exit into/from a project's lifecycle?

 When is the most appropriate moment for engagement to begin and through what measures can that entry-point be judged?

 How could the tighter integration of community engagement into a project team facilitate earlier involvement? What would that look like?

 To what extent does community engagement in the closeout phase contribute to long-term project success and a sense of community ownership?

 To what extent are community engagement approaches trial and error, based on experience? To what extent might the choice of engagement approach become more systematised with better data?

 How can community engagement be better integrated throughout the entire project lifecycle, including allowing appropriate time and resourcing for evaluation?

 How could earlier involvement of community engagement practitioners assist more thorough consideration of socio-political risk in problem definition? What value could be achieved or costs avoided through this?



Theme 4: Professionalisation

The research co-design revealed strong support for professionalisation of community engagement as a career. Work related to this theme will offer evidence, curriculum development, education and investigate pathways to achieve:

Recognition of community engagement as a legitimate profession, supported by tertiary and other qualifications and a rigorous evidence base to support decision making.

Workshop participants identified several factors as necessary to achieving the 'recognition of community engagement as a specialised, valued profession,' including: clarity of career pathways, need for pay equality with other industry professions, need for recognised qualifications, and the perception of community engagement as a feminised occupation. Using systems thinking, participants in this exercise suggested that professionalisation of community engagement could contribute directly to greater industry commitment to engagement and, consequently, to more adequate budgeting and resourcing to support best practice.

Key challenges and opportunities

Formalising a profession: Participants varied in their assessment of whether community engagement currently has a professionalised cohort of practitioners. Findings indicate that this situation requires attention but also appears to be improving, partly due to the evolution of tools such as the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard.⁹ The formalisation of community engagement as a profession was generally seen as crucial to the legitimisation of the profession and deeper integration of engagement into organisational structures and cultures, including facilitating a greater number of engagement practitioners to enter executive and senior executive leadership roles in the same manner as their engineering, finance and project management counterparts.



How does the organisational position of engagement staff, and the organisational culture surrounding engagement, impact both project performance and the perceptions of engagement as a discipline?



To what extent could tertiary qualifications in community engagement contribute to greater legitimacy and influence of engagement-focused roles within individual organisations? Within industry more broadly?



What are the educational and organisational pathways to improving the understanding and integration of community engagement into the practice of other disciplines, including engineering and planning?

Qualifications: A call for tertiary qualifications in community engagement arose repeatedly throughout the workshops, focused primarily on postgraduate-level course offerings. There is a strong opportunity for the Next Generation Engagement project to leverage the connections established between universities and peak industry bodies, such as IAP2, to support curriculum design and course development at leading institutions. Research secondments, through which MA or PhD candidates could gain further experience, were also seen as a chance to contribute to the professionalisation of the discipline. Leading professional bodies, including our partners IAP2, the Public Relations Institute of Australia and Engage2Act, are actively seeking opportunities to develop curriculum and create educational opportunities to support this aim.



To what degree are engagement professionals progressing into more generalised, executive leadership roles? What are the main factors influencing this situation (e.g. perceptions, qualifications, skills gaps)?



What would an explicit skill set for community engagement professionals look like and where would it best fit within existing tertiary programs/concentrations?

Enhancing legitimacy: Qualifications are an important means of building the legitimacy of community engagement as a profession. But research tells us that qualifications are only one piece of this puzzle. Power, capacity to 'gatekeep', collective activity for the public good, a shared professional culture, existence of professional/practitioner groups, and exclusionary power have all been demonstrated as equally important components of professionalisation.¹⁰ Consideration of these other aspects of professionalisation will be critical to advancing the standing and influence of community engagement.



What, if any, education models exist globally that could be adopted/adapted? And what gaps in educational offerings can be filled?



How could interim offerings, including custom education, new or existing training (e.g. IAP2 or IAIA programs), certification courses (e.g. like that of AICD) or short, non-degree university courses, help to fill gaps or meet the needs of those with more advanced practice/experience?

Theme 5: Regulation & policy

Research completed within this theme will contribute to:

Regulation and policy that is efficient and supports the integration of best practice community engagement into project selection, planning and delivery, to a similar degree as safety.

Findings from the Next Generation National Infrastructure Survey demonstrated that ‘regulatory and planning issues’ are seen as the second-most influential contributor to project delays, mothballing or cancellations, closely following ‘stakeholder and community pressure’. Workshop participants saw these issues as closely intertwined and cited policy uncertainty and election cycles as critical factors in triggering ‘declare and defend’ mode.

Key challenges and opportunities

Policy uncertainty: Both the National Infrastructure Survey and National Practitioner Workshops confirmed that policy uncertainty is seen as a major inhibitor to successful project delivery and to attracting private sector investment.

‘Public policy reversals and the enforceability of contractual claims’ were also recently identified by the Singapore-based EDHEC Infrastructure Institute as being a main inhibitor to institutional investment in infrastructure, globally.⁵

Workshop participants reported that policy instability can effect engagement quality.

Policy differences across jurisdictions further complicate this issue. As one workshop group wrote, ‘Each project seems to have differing policies – there is a need for a national policy.’



What are the key social and policy drivers necessary to foster policy stability for infrastructure delivery?



To what extent could the timing, approach or extent of community engagement act as a counter to challenges stemming from project politicisation?



What are the critical levers for reducing policy backflips and encouraging greater consistency across jurisdictions, especially in light of increasingly complex national projects?



What can we learn from successful policy and regulation models nationally and internationally to support effective engagement?

Project politicisation: Participants acknowledged that politicians are under increasing pressure due to the 24 hour news cycle, the changing stakeholder environment and the increasingly reactive nature of electorates. While politicisation is part of the reality of public infrastructure delivery, politicisation can detract from community engagement practitioners’ ability to focus on and deliver best practice.⁶

As one group of workshop participants suggested, community engagement practitioners are subject to pressures misaligned with the timing and relationship-formation vital to strong engagement, ‘because politics focuses on announcements and the next election and ‘we don’t have the data to show if the value of engagement outweighs the political risks.’

Furthermore, projects are often announced without consultation or a business case. Participants closely linked issues of project politicisation and policy uncertainty with project timing, identifying a range of challenges related to this as early as the ‘Problem Definition’ phase, including: ‘lack of bipartisan support of strategies and long-term bipartisan commitment to strategies’, ‘Minister’s office and project owner fearing the hard conversations,’ and this stage being driven by ‘political and technical imperatives.’



What would effective regulation to drive best practice community engagement for infrastructure delivery look like?

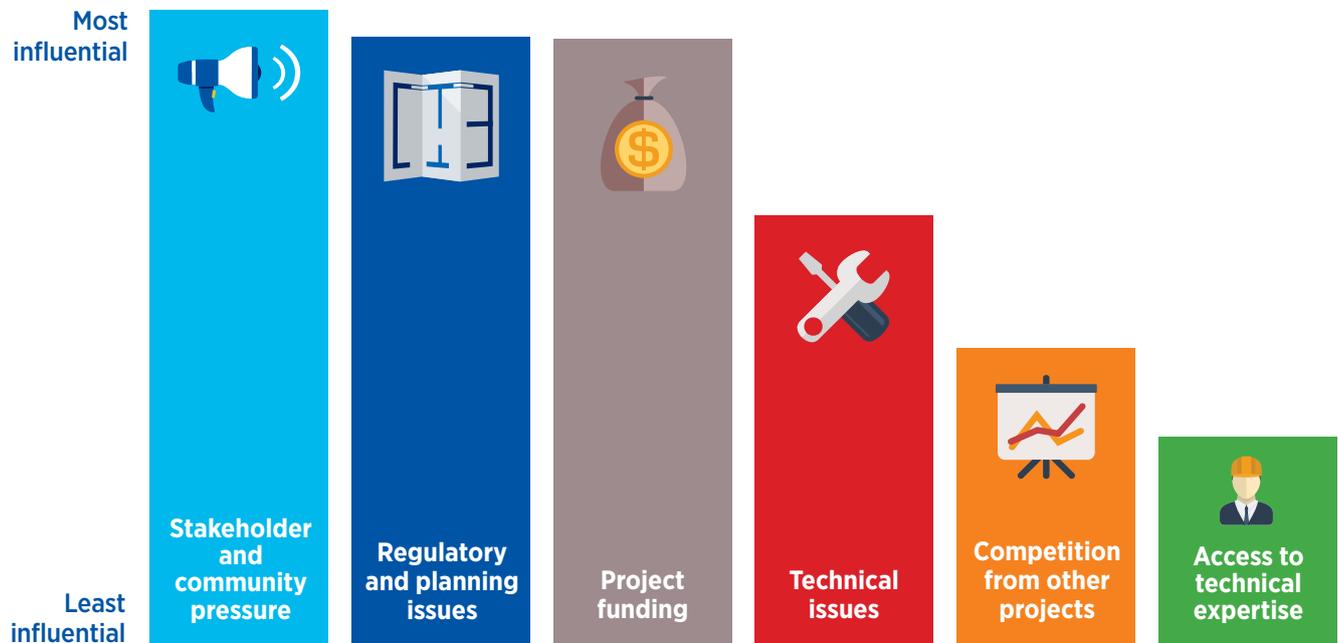


How could regulation and policy be adapted to better deal with the cumulative impacts being experienced by communities and associated consultation fatigue?

Benchmarking via compliance: Aims of going ‘beyond compliance’ are *de rigueur* for most projects today. Our early findings suggest, however, that community engagement would benefit from stronger regulatory or policy structures to support best practice. As workshop participants suggested, ‘Strategic planning and policy settings, including governance, resourcing and budgets, [could help to] set an accepted understanding of effective engagement.’ Strong arguments, including from the Victorian Auditor General’s Office,⁷ have been made to suggest that engagement-focused regulation and policy structures can help to embed best practice engagement,⁸ until such time as it is accepted as the way business is done. Or, in the words of one workshop group, ‘[There are] no legislation “must-dos”, i.e. like safety and environment, only EIS consultation requirements,’ making the need for better policy guidance critical.

“...community engagement practitioners are subject to pressures misaligned with the timing and relationship-formation vital to strong engagement, ‘because politics focuses on announcements and the next election, rather than genuine engagement.’”

Most influential factors affecting project delivery:



N=(project funding, pressure=117, competition=118, technical=120, access=121, regulatory=122)
Source: Next Generation National Infrastructure Survey 2017



Next steps for Next Generation Engagement

Having worked with industry to identify the key knowledge gaps, challenges and opportunities, the Next Generation Engagement Project is now primed to pursue a research agenda that responds to the infrastructure sector's priority concerns around engagement, social risk management and social license.

Our aim for the next 3-5 year phase of the project is to establish a world-leading, transdisciplinary research program to inform the success of the next generation of community engagement. This will require dedicated industry and research partners willing to share their experiences and support research funding, including competitive grant applications. Partners will benefit from:

- continuing to inform the research agenda to keep it responsive to their needs
- having the opportunity for deep learning about their organisations as case examples
- accessing comparative, international data
- priority access to research findings and advice.

Delivering responsive, impactful research

The next research phases will use 'co-design',⁴ a research process where the planners, developers and users of infrastructure collaborate closely with academics to deliver research that:

- **Addresses** priority issues, as defined by those experiencing them, not by researchers from the outside looking in (e.g. the co-designed research agenda summarised in this report)
- **Recognises** infrastructure sector practitioners and community members as experts, with academics facilitating deeper insights into that expertise
- **Delivers** meaningful and useful research outputs that can inform improved community engagement and successful project delivery.

Building a global picture

The next phases of the Next Generation Engagement Project also aim to internationalise this work. Our aim is to include international, comparative cases that identify best practice community engagement globally and enrich findings by building research collaborations with organisations like the EDHEC Infrastructure Institute, Singapore, and Tsinghua University, China.

Secure your position in the next phase of work

If your organisation would like a role in solving industry's stickiest engagement problems, talk to our team today. Partnership opportunities are available across one or all of the priority research themes.

Bringing communities into the discussion

Having worked with industry to identify challenges, opportunities and knowledge gaps, a critical next step for the research is to ask similar questions of communities.

Specifically, future research aims to incorporate community perspectives on:

- When communities feel they should be involved in the conversation.
- How communities wish to be engaged and whether there are identifiable factors that provide insights about preferred engagement methods.
- Politicisation of infrastructure selection, planning and delivery processes and how this impacts the engagement cycle.
- Identifying the benefits of infrastructure proposals and ways to maximise community benefits.



Research project opportunities

We have identified a range of high impact research opportunities within each of the five key research themes. Talk to the team about your organisation's project ideas and how to get involved in this groundbreaking work.

Value



- Industry-wide comparison of community engagement timing and approaches of projects delivered on time and on budget against those that were delayed, mothballed, completed but not as intended, or cancelled
- Comparative international case studies demonstrating the timing, processes and approaches supporting achievement of optimal community benefits and project value
- Creation of a de-identified case study database, shared throughout industry
- Various thematic projects drawing on national and international cases to investigate the contribution of infrastructure to critical issues including, transitions to low carbon economies and intergenerational project viability
- Study to identify the costs of conflict and project opposition, similar to work previously completed in the mining, oil and gas sector

Measurement



- Historical case studies (national and international) to quantify and model precursors of social risk and generate generic project risk profiles
- Comparative, interdisciplinary study to benchmark project value/costs against technical (i.e. financial risk) and non-technical risk (i.e. social, political)
- Development of social risk registers and processes, including technology development

Professionalisation



- National and international surveys of community engagement professionals to determine the state of the practice and baseline human resources data, leveraging membership of groups, including IAP2 and IAIA
- Initiation of engagement with the tertiary sector for graduate research curriculum design to support specialised qualifications and integration of community engagement studies into related degrees, including Engineering and Finance

Timing & approaches



- National survey targeting project directors and managers to clarify the timing, resourcing levels, organisational values and policy environments supporting projects with strong community engagement and the outcomes and value achieved
- Anonymised, in-depth interviews with project directors and managers to capture current perspectives on whether and how community engagement contributes to reduced costs, improved project value and project outcomes
- Comparative international study of timing of community engagement by project scale and type to identify 'tipping points' at which engagement may best forestall community opposition or generate value
- Study to combine social risk modelling with case data to recommend the best community engagement approaches to use in communities with particular risk profiles

Regulation & policy



- Comparative cases focused on different delivery models (e.g. DIY, PPP, public, private)
- Regulatory mapping to identify tensions, contradictions and overlaps contributing to red tape inefficiency
- Comparative international cases to produce regulatory and policy models that support efficient and successful project delivery
- In-depth study into implications of policy instability for project success

Our partners

Government and industry partners:



Infrastructure agency partners:



Industry association partners:



Research partners:



Founding partners:



Participating organisations:

The Next Generation Engagement Project would like to acknowledge the intellectual contribution of participants from the following organisations:

(Through the NSW Government)

Infrastructure NSW
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
NSW Department of Environment and Planning
Urban Growth NSW
Transport for NSW
Roads and Maritime Services (RMS)
Parramatta Light Rail
Cultural Infrastructure Project Management Office
NSW Department of Education

Queensland Government:

Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning
Translink

Victorian Government:

Places Victoria
Victorian School Building Authority

Western Australian Government:

Department of Planning
Department of State Development
Landcorp
WA Transport
Western Australia Mines and Petroleum
Western Australia Country Health Service

The World Bank
Shell
CPB Contractors
John Holland
WSP
GHD
Arcadis
Transurban
AECOM
Phillips Group
Townley Environment Services
Mills Wilson
Elton Consulting
The Comms Team
Articulous
Struber
Ogilvy
Community Relations Australia
Leisa Prowse Consulting
Plancom
Linchpin Environmental
Fenton Communications
Bastion S&Go
Sociometry

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Ideas, questions or want to join the next phases?

Get in touch with our project team:

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