

Project area: Blue-green infrastructure community engagement process
Intended audience: Practitioners

Introduction

Community engagement is a key concept to understand when working with Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI). However, it is not yet clear what should distinguish community engagement in a BGI context from other scenarios. This factsheet presents findings from a review of the literature to identify what the goals of BGI community engagement could most productively be.

Does bringing people together automatically mean community engagement?

No. The traditional approach to 'community engagement' has been a one-way “provider-centric” approach, whereby practitioners provide information to influence communities. BGI community engagement can only be effective if adequate consideration is given to:

Who: The notion of “community” needs to be well thought-out, considering the heterogeneity and demographics of all potentially affected communities. This calls into question the traditional focus on 'community representatives/groups'; the targeted involvement of groups perhaps not traditionally involved/interested in BGI matters should be sought out.

What: Engagement should be a two-way communication process where power is redistributed through negotiations between citizens and stakeholders, who agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities. This form of engagement challenges the notion of communities as recipients.

Why: Clarity is needed about the community engagement’s goals. This should be considered from the interest/perspective of both practitioners and communities. Such clarity can inform strategy and approach and could help practitioners be more open to engaging with multiple community agendas different from their own.

How: Information on BGI can be complex, so consideration will need to be given to using appropriate engagement techniques/approaches that avoid entrenching inequality. Practitioners will need to recognise the diverse knowledge needs of different audiences and adopt techniques allowing communities to express themselves in ways they can control.

When: Community composition, interest and perception will be dynamic. As such, engagement should not be short-term, or a one-off. Engaging communities from the early stages of planning, through the life of any decision-making (planning, design, commissioning, delivery, monitoring, maintenance and evaluation) and over the longer-term will be essential.

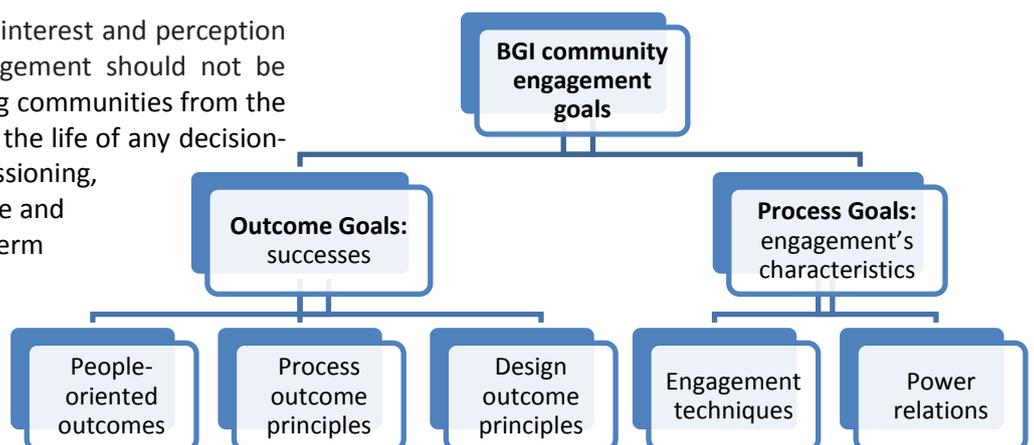


Figure 1: BGI community engagement goals

What should be the main goals of community engagement in the BGI context?

BGI community engagement goals can be understood in terms of 'outcome' and 'process'. **Outcome Goals** focus on what is regarded as success (for people, process and design), while **Process Goals** consider the means of engagement's characteristics (techniques and power relations).

People outcome principles are firstly that community engagement should be a platform for *capacity building and awareness creation*; enhancing community understanding of issues and devices, and improving practitioners' knowledge of community perceptions, interests and needs, as well as local physical conditions. Secondly, engagement should seek to ensure *community ownership* by developing buy-in and future leadership potential. Finally, community engagement should aim to be a platform for *community integration*; for interaction between different parts of the community who might not previously have had such opportunities.

Process outcome principles are to ensure that processes leading to the establishment of BGI are felt to be collaborative, efficient and sustainable. Indicators will include ensuring that: Community perspectives (regardless of background or social status) are considered seriously; engagement seeks to work as an avenue for social inclusion; avenues exist for resolving technical issues; costs and benefits are shared fairly, and that BGI is co-designed and not imposed from above.

Design outcome principles will ensure that successful continuation/delivery of BGI projects is appropriately designed and sustainable. The key indicators under this principle include delivering an improved design of BGI; one that can be scaled up and integrated into the city system, and that fits local context.

To ensure outcome goals are achieved, appropriate inputs will be required. Two key process-oriented themes are **engagement techniques** and **power relations**.

Engagement techniques should enhance local understanding and participation (using local terminology not technical/academic jargon), be seen to help dismantle power differentials (actively engaging disempowered groups) and promote social justice (be inclusive and transparent). This will involve avoiding allowing dominant discourses to be imposed, ensuring democratic outcomes, and actively promoting inputs from less powerful neighbourhoods and residents (community members).

Power relations - understanding these can help efforts to mitigate inequalities and ensure all voices are heard. The risk is that engagement interactions simply mirror and are guided by existing social relations, thereby entrenching and reinforcing inequalities in the exercise of power and voice. The processes of interaction and the ways in which these are structured and regulated will need to be with a transparent recognition of power relations within communities.



Figure 2: BGI sites for community engagement in Bristol. L-R: Embleton Road, Hanham Hall, Emersons Green.

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