Achieving effective community engagement about biosecurity. A checklist for policy-makers and senior staff in government and industry

This checklist should be read in conjunction with *Biosecurity engagement guidelines: Principles and practical advice for involving communities.* Available at daff.gov.au/abares

Guideline	Remarks	Suggestions	✓ or ✗
1. Within the organisation			
Promote biosecurity engagement throughout organisation	Biosecurity has traditionally been compliance driven. It might require significant culture change in some branches and sections to embrace community engagement.	– Continually reinforce the organisation's commitment to biosecurity engagement to all biosecurity staff. – Lift the profile of community engagement by • making it a priority for resourcing • showcasing past engagement successes internally and through the media • educating/training employees in community engagement.	
Ensure the biosecurity engagement engine underpins new regional biosecurity strategies	Engagement with representatives from all stakeholder groups from when the program is conceived will ensure better targeted programs and better outcomes than if engagement is commenced after the regional biosecurity program is in place.	– Use the biosecurity engagement engine as a framework for developing regional biosecurity engagement programs. Setting up a biosecurity engagement program involves ongoing decision making. The biosecurity engagement engine engages the right stakeholders for certain decisions at the best time.	
Support partnerships, linkages and networks to ensure close, mutually supportive relationships between government, industry and the community	Local people tend to perceive regional biosecurity management in 'us and them' terms. Biosecurity would be better served if a stronger sense of 'us all against the pest(s)' were engendered.	– Provide opportunities for staff to build and maintain networks and relationships with community representatives and peers in other government or industry organisations. – Increase the number of opportunities for all potential stakeholder group members to be engaged. Put special effort into engaging with those who have not yet been reached (engage beyond the 'low hanging fruit'). – Apply the engagement principles of trust, transparency, responsiveness and flexibility to building networks, commitment and accountability.	

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Put performance indicators in place to keep track of the organisation's commitment to biosecurity engagement		For example: – the number of partnerships that address community and industry biosecurity needs – effectiveness of partnerships; to what extent they – deliver positive outcomes – the number of staff involved in biosecurity engagement.	
2. Resourcing biosecurity engagement programs			
2.1 Time			
Allow for realistic timeframes	Effective engagement is difficult to achieve and maintain in short timeframes such as within a 3-year funding cycle.	– Allow for staged funding that is made available for each stage and the next stage's funding depends on the success of the previous stage. – Fund engagement programs that appear realistic, not overly ambitious.	
Allow for flexible and adjustable program plans	Effective biosecurity engagement means being responsive to new opportunities and issues. The engagement process therefore needs to be allowed to continually evolve.	– Do not expect detailed project plans and rigid milestones. – Recognise less tangible outcomes, such as building relationships, building trust and two-way communication.	
2.2 Funding			
Strengthen investment in biosecurity engagement	Much biosecurity funding is spent on developing and implementing technologies for preventing, diagnosing, surveilling, eradicating, controlling and analysing the risk of pests. The human engagement component is often overlooked, although human behaviour poses one of the most significant biosecurity threats.	– Make biosecurity engagement a funding priority for research and regional biosecurity programs.	

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2.3 Staff			
Minimise staffing changes	Engagement builds on social capital including relationships and trust, which are normally linked to a particular person. If staff interacting with stakeholder and target groups changes, the capital needs to be re-established, which is time consuming and costly to the engagement program.	– Provide incentives for staff in engagement programs to remain involved for the life of the program, especially program coordinators and industry development officers.	
Include strong interpersonal skills as a key selection criteria for personnel who will interact with stakeholder groups	Roles such as industry development officers are often filled based on a strong technical background. However, people are more successful in these roles if they are able to build rapport with stakeholder and target groups.	– Give preference to people with good interpersonal skills who have proven ability to develop rapport with stakeholder and target groups in addition to technical skills.	
Ensure technical experts are involved in the engagement process to address any technical enquiries or doubts	Most biosecurity engagement programs encounter stakeholders and target groups that doubt or misunderstand technical aspects of the pest involved. As it is important to address misconceptions quickly, the involvement of trusted technical experts is most effective.	– Allocate a trusted technical expert to the engagement program (even just on standby).	
Facilitate internal community engagement training for staff who interact with the community	Engagement with stakeholder groups is often done by people who have a strong technical background, but with a limited background in engagement.	– Include engagement training as a professional development requirement for all technical staff dealing with the public and members of stakeholder groups.	

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Provide support to officers planning and implementing engagement plans	Staff responsible for biosecurity engagement often have strong technical backgrounds and little training in relation to community engagement.	– For example, employ a community engagement expert as part of the organisation's communications team that could be contacted for advice.	
2.4 Be sensitive to new opportunities			
Be responsive to initiatives that originate at community level	Community groups may decide to tackle a certain pest. Support from local industries and/or state and local government bodies could contribute significantly to the success and longevity of these initiatives.	– Allocate staff to deal with such initiatives and/or help communities make contact with the right people within the organisation.	
3. Requirements for biosecurity engagement programs			
Enable inclusive stakeholder engagement to underpin regional biosecurity program formation, design and implementation	Most regional biosecurity plans are developed through a top-down approach with limited input from stakeholders at grassroots level. Collaboration and communication with stakeholders, including target group representatives, from the point the program starts is vital to ensure maximum effectiveness.	– Start engagement with representatives from stakeholder groups (including target group representatives or people who are familiar with them) early in development of regional biosecurity plans.	
Ensure community engagement is fully integrated into existing regional biosecurity activities	Community engagement is often an add-on to existing regional biosecurity programs, which can undermine its success. In addition, regional biosecurity has traditionally been compliance driven, so a 'culture change' might be necessary in some agencies.	– Provide the necessary resources, including training to ensure biosecurity staff understand and support the role of community engagement in addressing regional biosecurity issues.	
Insist that biosecurity engagement programs contain robust, but practical monitoring and evaluation components to ensure the intended outcomes are being achieved	Many biosecurity engagement programs tend to prioritise allocation of resources to getting the job done. Without a solid monitoring and evaluation component, serious issues can be overlooked or recognised too late, undermining the program's effectiveness.	– Include simple, efficient, reliable and cost-effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into design of all biosecurity engagement programs.	

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Test or pilot engagement tools with representatives of the target group before they are fully implemented	Tools, such as signs, brochures and advertisements, can be misunderstood if not refined after testing with target group representatives.	– For tools that are harder to 'test', such as shed meetings, the first meeting could be considered a pilot and feedback sought from participants, to refine subsequent meetings.	
Ensure biosecurity messages are designed with certain target groups in mind, taking care to demonstrate relevance to each stakeholder group ('What's in it for me?')	The tendency to communicate biosecurity messages using a one-size-fits-all approach that is not sensitive to the needs and priorities of different groups is common. As these messages do not connect well with target groups, they are less likely to result in the desired change.	– Promote and support social research components in the biosecurity engagement programs to better understand different stakeholder groups, by gathering baseline information early in the program.	
Ensure clear communication with stakeholder and target groups	Information should be accessible by being widely available (online, popular media, presentations, talks) and in the right format that makes the information easy to grasp.	– Encourage use of plain English, discourage technical jargon and avoid cluttered language. – Promote use of clear images and pictures of pests and plant symptoms. – Encourage production of practical materials, such as posters, glovebox guides and weatherproof materials.	
4. Other important aspects of biosecurity engagement			
– Ensure the organisation initiating the engagement uses the engagement principles of strengthening trust, transparency, responsiveness and flexibility to build networks, commitment and accountability. Encourage use of these principles among all stakeholders. – Ensure engagement is genuine; do not let the process be hijacked by powerful or more articulate groups. – Place priority on locally run programs, rather than those from 'head office' in capital cities, by people who have established relationships with target groups and a good understanding of local conditions.			