

How to identify (and manage) primary and secondary stakeholders

Stakeholder relationships require work to maintain a healthy and positive association.

Stakeholders are vital to the success of your organisation. Like all relationships, they require work to maintain a healthy and positive association.

To build and maintain good relationships with stakeholders, you need to be clear about your primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are those who have a direct interest in your organisation, whereas secondary stakeholders have an indirect association or benefit.

If you have clear, concise plans of how to address each of your key stakeholder segments, you will ensure your organisation is continuously affirming your relevance.

Stakeholder engagement should be addressed in your marketing and communications plan and reviewed regularly. Refer to [How to write a communications plan](#).

For your client base, refer to [How to understand market scale](#), and [How to identify and evaluate market segments](#).

Stakeholder clarity

By undertaking an assessment of your key relationships, you will clarify those that have the most relevance to your organisation and help you fulfil your mission.

Create a table of two or three columns and list all the organisations you need to interact with to provide your services. You can include suppliers (trade) and organisations you rely upon but may not have a financial arrangement with e.g. a volunteer agency.

Types of stakeholders

- Government agencies (Commonwealth, State, local)
- Organisations you partner with
- Other community-based organisations (not for profit and for profit)
- Donors or other benefactors, either individuals or organisations.

You can consider current, recent or past relationships that are all still relevant, and include organisations that you like as stakeholders but have not yet approached.

Identifying primary and secondary stakeholders

Primary stakeholders

Your primary stakeholders should stand out from your list. They have the following characteristics:

- Typically relate strongly to your core mission and purpose
- Share similar aims to you but may not have the reach, methods or capability your organisation can deliver
- Will often find (or be aware of you) if you do not find them
- Can often provide an enormous lift in your capacity (funding, scope, access, information)
- Will generally want you to succeed as they may choose to invest in your ideas, methods, capacity
- May have a formal relationship with you (contract, agreement, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)).

Secondary Stakeholders

- Are important to your mission but may be one of many with that status
- They may interact with other organisations in the same market as yours
- Can be more easily replaced if they drift away from your mission and purpose
- Are often keen to engage and will be proactive
- Have the potential to move to become a Primary stakeholder (once they learn more about your work, they may want to establish stronger ties)
- Can be excellent partners if they have a specialisation to value-add to your organisation and share your values and purpose.

You can now determine if the organisations you have listed are a primary or secondary stakeholder and insert them into your table.

Assess true value

It will be important to note in your assessment process, that you define what a primary stakeholder expects from your organisation. You may have to analyse and compare their goal(s) and your organisational goals to see where alignment exists.

- Are you aligned due to similar high-level aims or goals?
- Can you quickly see what it is they buy/get/need from your support?
- Can you readily see why you might struggle should they no longer be a supporter/aligned to your organisation?

Once you have captured the actual value that your organisation can deliver to a primary stakeholder, you will have greater confidence to ensure the relationship builds on that shared understanding. [How to create a compelling Value Proposition](#) may assist you further.

Getting and maintaining engagement

Always ensure your primary stakeholders are very well informed about your mission and how you achieve it. Also ensure that where an agreement exists between your organisation and a primary stakeholder, that the real value at the centre of that agreement continues to be addressed as the relationship progresses.

Both primary and secondary stakeholders will need to be engaged in your work outputs, outcomes and impact. Ensure commitments between the parties are met when and where it counts, in terms of targets, results and impact.

Once a relationship has been established it needs to be maintained, or it might wither away. Your organisation's communications planning should address stakeholder engagement strategies to ensure you keep them informed and consistently promote your achievements to them. This will ensure your primary stakeholders understand how you are meeting your mission and why they are engaged with you. [How to develop strong supplier relationships](#) may be relevant for you.

Also refer to [How to develop market engagement strategies](#).

Resources

TasCOSS has developed a 10-episode podcast series covering a range of topics relating to board effectiveness, for this topic see [S01E06: Stakeholder Engagement – TasCOSS](#)

Referenced links

- [How to write a communications plan](#)
- [How to create a compelling Value Proposition](#)
- [How to develop strong supplier relationships](#)