



Stakeholder Engagement, Facilitation & Mediation

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The Role of RKP

Introduction

We have been engaged as Facilitators and Process Consultants for Finding Sanctuary to help the process reach its agreed aim and objectives; working with the wide range of stakeholders. The aim of this note is to give an overview of our approach and what you can expect from us. It also outlines what we expect in return from participants and project funders.

What is a Facilitator / Process Consultant?

A consensus building process is used where a number of stakeholders need to work collaboratively to resolve existing, or potential, conflict.

For the process to work well an independent 3rd party focuses on the “process” by which the work is done, without having any substantive interest in the “content” (the issues). The role of the 3rd party is essential in helping stakeholders work together (or negotiate), creatively, on a level playing field, toward mutually acceptable or beneficial outcomes. This 3rd party role is the facilitator.

Each process is specifically designed to address the needs being expressed, the uncertainties & the complexities involved and the decisions needing to be made. Design is therefore a critical to chance of success of the process. This design role is that of a process consultant.

Our Experience

We have substantial process design and facilitation experience of processes involving high degrees of technical complexity, scientific uncertainty and characterised by being highly contentious public policy issues. We also have extensive experience of assisting collaborative strategic planning processes. A brief list of examples:

- SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group EMF) to agree policy advice to UK government on precautionary measures for non ionising radiation from electricity distribution networks: mid 2004 - 2008
- Magnox Decommissioning Dialogue, to agree a decommissioning strategy for the UK's Magnox nuclear reactors: Mid 2003 - December 2004
- CORWM (Committee on Radioactive Waste Management); National Stakeholder Forum : mid 2005 - late 2006
- Development of Core Strategies within the Local Development Framework, eg West Dorset, North Dorset, Gloucestershire County.
- Development of Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements in numerous locations across England and Wales.

We have also provided training in facilitation skills and in process design/management. The following are a few examples:

- Metropolitan Police - Consultation & Engagement Process Design
- British Property Federation/IDeA/Planning Advisory Service - Negotiation and collaborative working
- Sole trainers for the Environment Agency on all stakeholder engagement and facilitation courses.
- Natural England, Wildlife Trust and others, training course on collaborative working
- The Environment Council - 1,3 and 6 day professional stakeholder dialogue courses



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Our Role in the Finding Sanctuary Process

Our responsibilities will include:

- The design the process,
- The design and facilitation of meetings, workshops, other interactive events and training
- Advising on approaches to group decision making
- Participant / stakeholder liaison;
- Providing relevant logistical and administrative advice & support to the project team;
- Appropriate recording of proceedings
- Preparation (and distribution) of reports following meetings.

We will not be responsible for the issues discussed in the dialogue process. We hold no formal position on any of the substantive issues that are or might be considered. To do so would compromise our role as an independent convenor. It is for the participants to decide what issues are raised and their relative importance.

Products: What to expect

Products from dialogue processes can usually be divided into two areas; visible and invisible. Invisible products include greater trust and stronger relationships between organisations and individuals. Visible products include agreements, reports and actions.

Our expectations of funders and other stakeholders

We do not make or see a distinction between the status of stakeholders and we therefore treat all participants as equals. We expect all participants:

- to respect any ground rules which they have developed and under which the process is run.
- to accept responsibility for driving the content of discussions.
- to act in good faith.

Independence of R K Partnership

Our independence is a vital asset. Without this our work would be compromised. In particular, we could not continue to act as an honest broker, consensus-builder or undertake to resolve disputes unless all parties trusted us and respected our impartiality. A biased or prejudiced third party would soon be found out.

This means that a number of principles guide our activities:

- we will not work with organisations who who may wish to manipulate the agenda to their own advantage at the expense of other interests
- if any party is unhappy with our involvement or believes that we are prejudiced or compromised in any way then we will ask them to be specific, try to agree appropriate changes in our behaviour and as a last resort, offer to withdraw
- though as individuals we may have strong views about an issue, R K Partnership will not take a position on the substantive aspects of a problem or dispute. Rather, we will use our knowledge to inform how we run the dialogue/collaborative process
- we will be open with stakeholders over funding