



# Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series

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**Cluster:** Applied Systems Thinking

**Theme:** Public-Sector Innovation and Reform

**Further Reading:**

<https://www.seachangeproject.eu/resources#type=report>

McHugh, P., Domegan, C. and Duane, S. (2018) 'Protocols for Stakeholder Participation in Social Marketing Systems', *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 24(3), pp.164-193.

Domegan, C., McHugh, P., Flaherty, T. and Duane, S. (2019) 'A Dynamic Stakeholder Engagement Framework for Challenging Marketing System Times'. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 39(2), pp.136-150.

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## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Protocols for Stakeholder Engagement

According to the [United Nations DESA and ITAR groups](#), the “multi-stakeholder nature of the 2030 Agenda demands an enabling environment for participation by all, as well as new ways of working in partnerships to mobilize and share knowledge”. Stakeholders, including citizens, and their engagement have never been more important in an increasingly interconnected world, facing complex societal problems, just transitions, inequality and sustainability challenges.

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, one significant issue impeding the acceleration of pace for change is the degree of multi-stakeholder active engagement. Engagement is more than communication. It embraces active participation in both problem definition and solution generation. Literature to date is extremely limited in its approach on how to systematically identify and encourage stakeholder engagement. In response, work from the EU Horizon 2020 project Sea Change, a pan European study designed to bring about a fundamental shift in the way European citizens view their relationship with the sea, set about designing and testing protocols for stakeholder engagement, drawing upon management, behavioural and implementation sciences.

### Research Findings

Every person in a community and society has a stake, whether it is high on their agenda or not. Embedding a stakeholder orientation in Sea Change, using appropriately designed and tested stakeholder engagement protocols ensured that all voices were heard. Seven stakeholder engagement protocols were designed including boundary analysis, stakeholder identification, stakeholder classification, identification of stakeholder interests, setting a stakeholder engagement strategy, working with stakeholders and stakeholder impact assessment. This protocol set ensured that stakeholder deliberations in Sea Change were not restricted to only those who were aware or had a vested interest in the problem but also non-identified stakeholders, leading to better outcomes for Ocean Literacy.

### Policy Implications

For policies to achieve sustainable change, engagement must go significantly beyond just asking people for their opinions. Policy processes need to give all stakeholders, who can affect, or are affected, a voice in relation to priorities for change and ownership and responsibility for solutions to influence their welfare. Greater engagement 'with' stakeholders, using meaningful processes and protocols, for decision- and policy-making at all levels, builds collaborative places and spaces, and leads to better policy outcomes. Stakeholder engagement is critical if systemic change is to be achieved in the face of wicked and complex problems relating to the SDGs and Agenda 2030.