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# **METHODOLOGY FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT within the project Inter Ventures**

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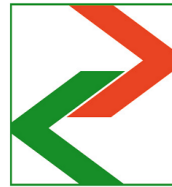
on behalf of

the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation of SMEs is a key influencing factor of their competitiveness and the prosperity of their regions. In border areas it offers additional potential for cooperation and new markets. Borders and peripheral position may however also hinder cross-border and international business activities, especially in less developed economies of the EU. Coming from that, the aim of the project Inter Ventures is to **promote the internationalization of SMEs in EU border regions, thus contributing to their growth and increased competitiveness and contributing though to the development of boarder regions.**

Engaging Stakeholders in the process of SME internationalisation is important because, for example, a particular policy change may disadvantage an established local business or may have implications for groups of SMEs concerned with the particular issue. Engaging actively with Stakeholders from the start of the project is essential for achieving the aims of this project. By engaging with Stakeholders more broadly, rather than just engaging with few other organizations on the same field, enables the Project Partners to consider the range of individuals, groups and organizations that might benefit from the project Inter Ventures. In addition, there is an equally powerful argument that working with Stakeholders, particularly with those who can make decisions regarding the development of policy or the distribution of resources concerning SME internationalisation, can enable the Project Partners to do more relevant work that is more likely to yield beneficial impacts. The latter is because Stakeholders are more likely to feel ownership over the project if they are embedded in it and are therefore more likely to assist the Project Partners and help to implement project recommendations.

This Methodology for Stakeholder Engagement has been designed by the Association of the European Border Regions (AEBR) to support the project Inter Ventures approach on internationalization of SMEs in cross-border areas by providing a tool to Project Partners to better understand what is a Stakeholder, why Stakehodleer engagement is necessary, what would the Project Partners gain from Stakeholders while pursuing the objectives of the project Inter Ventures, and finally, how to engage / to interact with the Stakeholders.

On the following pages the Methodology with seven steps for engaging Stakeholders will be introduced together with tips to the Project Partners about how to benefit the most from this engagement.

## 2. CONCEPTS

Before continuing with discussions on the Stakeholder engagement, the key definitions, used throughout this Methodology.

### **STAKEHOLDER:**

A Stakeholder in the project Inter Ventures is any person, organisation or group that is affected by or who can affect the outcomes of this project<sup>1</sup>.

### **STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION:**

Stakeholder Participation is a process where Stakeholders (e.g. individuals, groups and organizations) choose to take an active role in making decisions about things that affect them.

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:**

Stakeholder Engagement is everything that can be done with Stakeholders within the project, i.e. consult, listen, understand, communicate, influence, negotiate, etc., with the broader objectives of satisfying the needs of the project Inter Ventures through gaining the approval and support of the Stakeholders, or at least minimising their opposition or obstruction.

### **STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS:**

Stakeholder Analysis aims to identify people, organizations or groups who may be either positively or negatively affected by the project Inter Ventures. In addition to identifying those affected by the particular project, Stakeholder Analysis also seeks to identify those who might affect the ability to complete the project and who generate impacts, either positive or negative, i.e. they may have the power to enable or block the outcomes of the project.

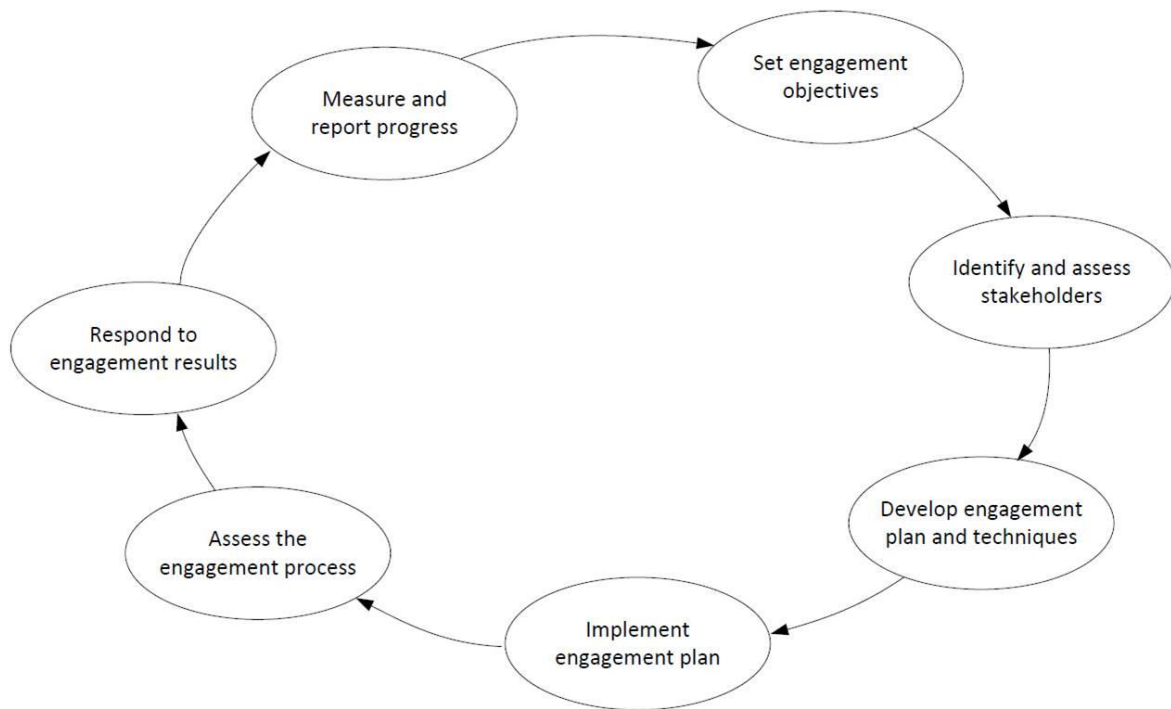
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<sup>1</sup> NOTE: one of the Stakeholders can be 'the public'. However, rather than thinking of the public as a single entity, it is useful to think about different 'publics' (e.g. audience segmentation) to identify groups who are more likely to be interested in the outcomes of the particular project.

### 3. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The main aim of the Stakeholder engagement process in the project Inter Ventures is to **identify and engage every important Stakeholder at local, regional, national and international level** to ensure that the outcomes of the project Inter Ventures will be solidly contained in regional, national and EU policies.

However, even though every Stakeholder engagement process has to be tailored for different needs and requirements, on the basis of Deming Circle (PDCA – plan, do, check, act), a number of recurring steps can be identified that are fundamental for an effective Stakeholder engagement (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Stakeholder engagement process. Modification from the Deming Circle (PDCA – plan, do, check, act)*

All these seven steps of the Stakeholder engagement will be discussed in the following chapters of this Methodology.

### **3.1. STEP 1: SET ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

A good planning can help in reducing the lengthiness of the process, reducing its costs and helping in maintaining the defined objectives of this project. Though, before beginning a Stakeholder engagement process, the objectives need to be set for the Stakeholder engagement. Answering the following questions will help to set the objectives for the Stakeholder engagement:

#### **PRIORITY**

What is your priority in engaging Stakeholders? / Why a Stakeholder engagement process should be undertaken? For example, Stakeholder engagement is a reaction to an external pressure.

#### **SCOPE**

What is the scope of Stakeholder engagement? For example, what is the geographical area (particular municipality, region or a border area)? What is the timeline – is it going to be a lasting process or just one-time-only?

#### **EMBEDDEDNESS**

Where does the Stakeholder engagement fit into your organization? For example, what unit is responsible for the Stakeholder engagement?

#### **WHO**

Who has a stake? Even though a full Stakeholder mapping will be discussed in Step 2: Identify and, main Stakeholder groups should be considered also in here. For example, academics, chambers of commerce etc. In here should also be considered the possible conflicting interests between Stakeholders.

#### **ENGAGEMENT**

How to engage? / Level of involvement of Stakeholders? The Engagement Plan and techniques will be discussed in more detail in Step 3, but the overall vision, level of ambition and availability of resources (financial, human (including capacity building), temporal and technological) will determine if the engagement is proactive or reactive. For example, the Stakeholder engagement can take the form of a single meeting or involve the creation of a continuing dialogue mechanism such as, for example, a Stakeholder Advisory Board. Also, the engagement should be structured in a way that enables the perspectives of diverse Stakeholders to be considered.

Note that in the context of Stakeholder engagement, an engagement approach should be used that is culturally sensitive and accessible to all participants. This means considering context, location, format, and language.

## 3.2. STEP 2: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

In the beginning of planning a Stakeholder engagement process, a Stakeholder Analysis needs to be carried out. Through the Stakeholder Analysis will be identified those groups and individuals that will ultimately affect or will be affected by the process and outputs of the project Inter Ventures. Stakeholder Analysis is also important to distinguish the pre-mentioned group from those who are not directly involved or affected by the project Inter Ventures. Therefore, being able to identify and select the right Stakeholders is of fundamental importance since each Stakeholder has different types and content of information, perceptions, interest and influence of an issue and not all of them may result useful in a specific context.

A successful Stakeholder Analysis will help to

- Identify who has a stake in the project
- Categorize and prioritize the Stakeholders that are needed to concentrate on; and
- Identify existing relationships between Stakeholders (whether conflicts or alliances).

There are three stages in this process – identify, analyse and map. Each stage will be discussed thoroughly below.

### 3.2.1. IDENTIFY THE STAKEHOLDERS

All the relevant Stakeholders should be identified prior to any attempt to engage. The preliminary list of Stakeholders for the project Inter Ventures can be found in Annex 5.6. However, for every Project Partner, the list should be amended and modified based on the of the Project Partner, the institutional context and the objectives for Stakeholder engagement. It can be done via answering the following questions:

- Who has the best knowledge to enforce the outputs of the project Inter Ventures?
- Who has the power to enable project Inter Ventures to achieve the aimed impacts, and who has the power to block them?
- Who might be disadvantaged or lose out as a result of this project?

Brainstorm the list of Stakeholders without screening; include everyone who has an interest in project Inter Ventures in your area today and who may have one tomorrow. Where possible, identify individuals – not just organizations. Here are some additional considerations to help you brainstorm:

- **Learn from past and current engagements:** Which Stakeholders communicate regularly with your organization?
- **Consider the future:** assess potential Stakeholders from new groups
- **Ensure diversity:** make sure to include a rich diversity of Stakeholders embodying a spectrum of expertise, attitudes and geographies. Include individuals from each of the Stakeholder categories (see Figure 2 for reference): key players, context setters, subjects, crowd<sup>2</sup>.
- **Use technology tools:** analyse your social media, it provides opportunities to understand who is interested in your organization.
- **Consider the impact:** it is crucial not to prioritize noisy critics over genuine experts. It should be carefully considered who is most impacted by the decisions and operations within this project.

To identify the Stakeholders, you can use also questionnaire with snowball effect (see an example questionnaire in Annex 5.5).

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<sup>2</sup> The definitions of these groups are brought out below under Figure 2.



Note that in creating the list of Stakeholders, it is important to ensure that no significant Stakeholders have been omitted from the project, as such omissions can significantly compromise the success of the project.

Lastly, the final list of Stakeholders should not remain static over time, but should change as the external environment evolves and as Stakeholders themselves make decisions, shift focus or change their opinions.

### 3.2.2. ANALYZE

Together with the identification, Project Partners should profile the Stakeholders in order to properly engage them. Below is provided a list of potential criteria the Project Partners might use to analyse the Stakeholders. Note that not all of these criteria will be relevant<sup>3</sup> for every engagement, and we recommend an absolute maximum of four distinct criteria:

**Interest:** How willing is the Stakeholder to engage with the Project Partner and the overall process?

**Influence:** How much influence does the Stakeholder have over the outcomes of the Inter Ventures project, either directly or via other Stakeholders? How they can influence the targeted Policy Instrument? In here must be also clarified whom they influence, e.g. SMEs, associations, policy makers etc.

To determine the connections and influence a Social Network Analysis (SNA) can be conducted (see Figure 1 for a map that it creates). SNA is a good solution for projects with high-stakes to identify Stakeholders who may shape the future trajectory of an issue, even if their direct influence on the project is currently low.

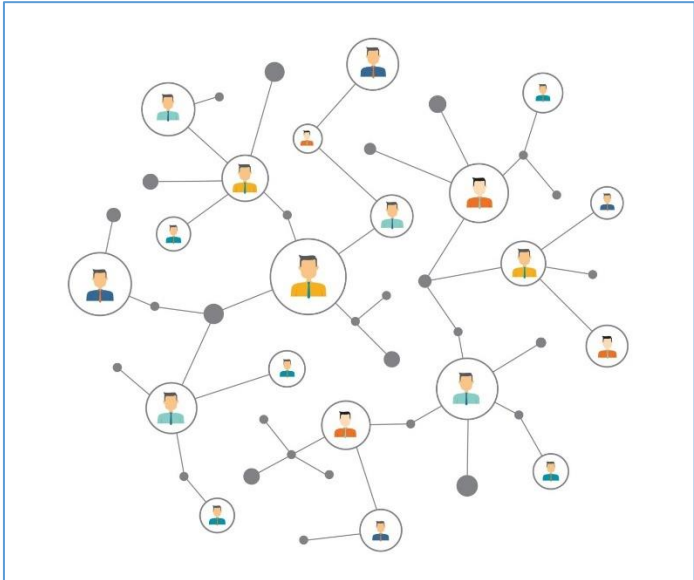


Figure 1. An example of Stakeholder mapping. The Stakeholders with many connections and the Stakeholders which connect smaller groups to the main group are considered as Key Players.

<sup>3</sup> The most commonly used approach to Stakeholder Analysis is to consider the relative interest of a Stakeholder in the issue or decision being considered versus their level of influence over that issue or decision.

Also, identification of the key relationships is very important to avoid exacerbating conflicts and enable creation of alliances that empower marginalized groups. It can be very valuable to know in advance about conflicts between individuals, organizations or groups, so that inflaming conflicts and disputes can be either avoided or solved.

**Expertise:** Does the Stakeholder have information or expertise on the issues dealt with within this project, either directly or because they will shape the future of an issue?

**Orientation:** is the view of the Stakeholder toward the outcomes of the project Inter Ventures a collaborative or a combative one?

**Vulnerability:** to what degree will the Stakeholder be impacted by the project?

**Capacity:** to what degree does the Stakeholder have the capacity to engage at the level desired by the Project Partner? To what degree is the Stakeholder able to meet the commitments required by the entire engagement?

**Trust:** What degree of mutual familiarity and trust is there between the Project Partner and the Stakeholder? Is there a track record of both sides adhering to commitments, respecting confidentiality, and engaging in productive dialogue?

To profile the Stakeholders, select from above criteria to generate a chart with short descriptions of how Stakeholders fulfil them (for example, see Table 1 below). This data set will help the Project Partners later to decide which Stakeholders to engage and how.

**Table 1. Profiling the Stakeholders**

Stakeholder	Influence	Interest	Expertise	Orientation	Vulnerability	Capacity	Trust
A	<b>High:</b> Stakeholder is a key shaper of opinion in this field	<b>High:</b> Stakeholder has high interest and willingness to engage with this project	<b>High:</b> Stakeholder’s knowledge in the issue is of value to the Project Partner	<b>High:</b> Proactive Stakeholder	<b>High:</b> the Project will directly impact the life of this Stakeholder	<b>Low:</b> the Stakeholder has few resources for engagement	<b>Low:</b> mutual trust is low
B	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	High
C	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	High	Medium

In choosing the criteria, note that expertise, influence and interest are the criteria that are likely to be relevant for any strategic engagement.

**3.2.3. MAPPING**

Mapping of Stakeholders generates a visual analysis that Project Partners can use to further determine which Stakeholders will be the most useful to engage with. Mapping allows the Project Partners to evaluate Stakeholders by using consistent criteria, and helps to visualise the often complex interplay of issues and relationships. In mapping, the Project Partners may need to create a number of visualizations to capture all possible sights.

The most commonly used approach is to consider the relative interest of a Stakeholder in the issue or decision being considered versus their level of influence over that issue or decision. This is typically done by using an **'interest-influence matrix'** (Figure 2). To add more dimensions to this grid, the Project Partners can plot the Stakeholders on the grid by using different circle sizes or different colours to mark, for example, the expertise of the Stakeholder or its vulnerability.

Using the interest-influence matrix, the Stakeholders can be classified as key players, context setters, subjects and the crowd.

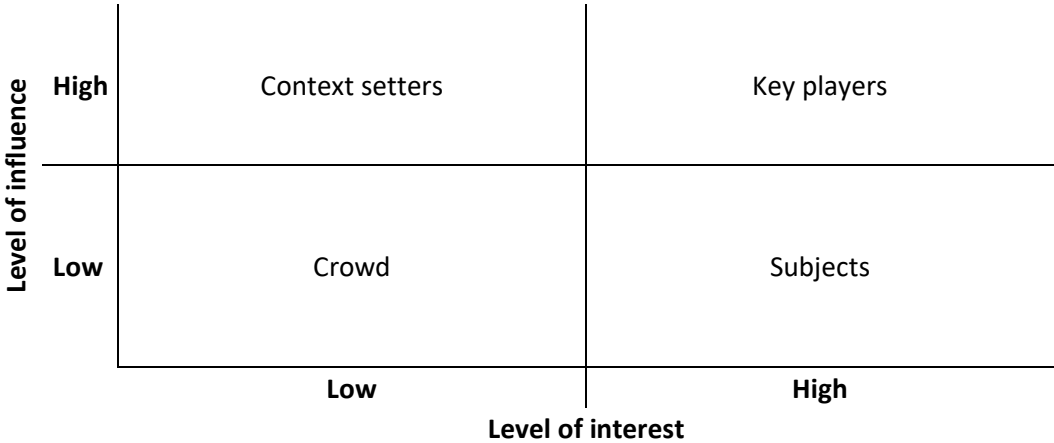


Figure 2. Interest-influence matrix used to identify stakeholders with differing levels of interest and influence over the particular project (adaption from Mendelow's power-interest matrix)

Stakeholders with high levels of interest and influence are termed **key players**, and it is argued by some that priority should be given to engaging actively with this group to affect change.

**Context setters** are highly influential, but have little interest in the particular project. However, because of their influence, they may have significant influence over the success of the particular project, but may be difficult to engage with. Though, particular effort may be necessary to engage this group in the project.

**Subjects** have high levels of interest in the particular project but low levels of influence. Therefore, although by definition they are supportive, they are unlikely to be able to play a significant role in supporting the implementation of the project outcomes. However, it has to be kept in mind that the Subjects may become influential in a later stage by forming alliances with other more influential Stakeholders. Subjects are often the marginal Stakeholders that may also be considered 'hard to reach' and that might warrant special attention to secure their engagement and to empower them to engage as equals in the Project with more influential Stakeholders.

The **crowd** are Stakeholders who have little interest or influence on the outcomes of the particular project and though there is little need to consider them in much detail or to engage with them. However, it has to be kept in mind that, as with the case of Subjects, the influence or the interest of the Crowd may change with time.

Finally, it should be noted that all methods for identifying Stakeholders provide a snap-shot in time, Stakeholders' interests and influence. This means that **Stakeholder mapping exercises should be revisited and updated periodically** to ensure that the needs and priorities of all Stakeholders continue to be captured.

### **HAVE YOU DEVELOPED THE 'RIGHT' LIST?**

By working through the three steps brought out in this chapter, a robust, relevant, prioritized Stakeholder list should be created that directly applies to the goals of the Project Partner. However, this is not a static process. The list will evolve.

Answer the following questions to see if you are ready to move on:

- Is the list focused on relevant Stakeholders who are important to the current and future efforts of this project?
- Do you have a good understanding of where Stakeholders are coming from, what they may want, whether they would be interested in engaging with the project and why?

### 3.3. STEP 3: DEVELOP AN ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Now when the Stakeholders are identified and mapped, the **Stakeholder engagement plan** should be developed. The engagement should be structured in a way that enables the perspectives of the diverse Stakeholders to be considered. To develop a proper engagement plan, the possible engagement approaches and techniques for the engagement are discussed thoroughly in the following sections.

#### 3.3.1. SELECTING AN ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Based on the mapping exercise, there are several groups of Stakeholders defined. It is not practical nor smart to engage all identified Stakeholder groups on the same level of intensity, using the same approach. It is important to be **highly selective in choosing Stakeholders** for ongoing consultation and collaboration because being strategic and clear about whom to engaging with — and why — can help save both time and money. Even more important, it will help better manage the expectations of the Stakeholders. When Stakeholder groups are consulted and express opinions, only to find no action taken, can significantly undermine the perceived value of the exercise and negatively impact trust and reputation.

Moreover, the resources at the disposal of the Project Partner also shape the choice of engagement approach. For example, a more ambitious strategy costs more.

There are altogether **six approaches for the Stakeholder engagement** (see Table 2 below). The engagement approaches are listed based on their resource consumption<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 2. Approaches for the Stakeholder Engagement**

Engagement approach	Overview	Example	Resources
MONITOR	Tracking or monitoring Stakeholder positions via research or discussion with other parties	Tracking the issues of greatest concern of selected Stakeholder groups	€
MESSAGE	Adapting communications scope and messaging to meet Stakeholder expectations	Creating and targeting messages to specific Stakeholders	€
ADVOCATE	Activities to enlist support for a specific effort or position that may have opposition or reflect an actual or perceived imbalance of power	Clarification of a position of the Project Partner in response to Stakeholder criticism	€€
CONSULT	Soliciting explicit feedback or input on a project. Implies an expectation by the Stakeholders that the Project Partner will make concrete changes based on the consultation	Consultation with a Stakeholder advisory board on policy or process changes regarding the projects approach to a particular issue	€€€
COLLABORATE	Initiating or participating in two-way dialogue focused on mutual learning and solutions. Can include co-creation of new ideas and approaches	Consultation with local community and political groups to determine the most mutually beneficial options	€€€€

<sup>4</sup> Note that this tool provides only a rough estimate. Costs depend on a wide range of variables and can be developed only within the context of a particular industry, company or issue.

INNOVATE	Shared work on common objectives of the project and its Stakeholders. Can include co-creation, as well as co-implementation, of new ideas	Launch of a new product or service in partnership with expert Stakeholders	€€€€€
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On Figure 3 are brought out the proposed engagement approaches for each quadrant. If used effectively, this tool helps to plan the activities based on the level of support the various Stakeholders are likely to provide and to prioritise efforts in engaging the Stakeholders, as appropriate to the needs of the project.

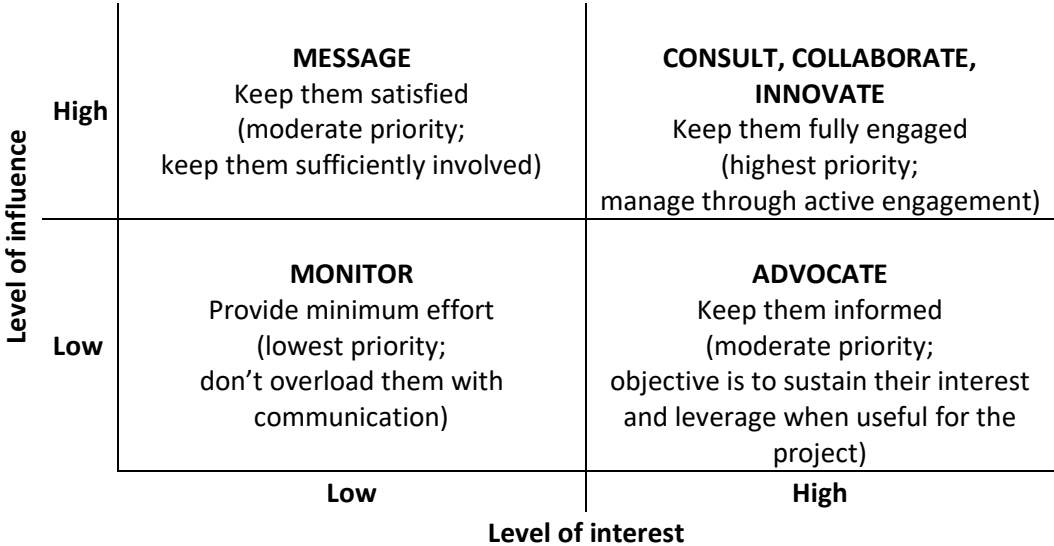


Figure 3. The proposed engagement approach to consider in planning Stakeholder engagement (adaption from Mendelow's power-interest matrix)

**3.3.2. FINDING THE TECHNIQUE**

The previous steps – setting the goals, mapping the Stakeholders and finding the approach - have all led to the final step of preparation – identifying the technique that matches the engagement approach and level of ambition of the Stakeholder engagement. Table 3 presents the techniques suitable for the chosen approach. Based on this table the relevant techniques for engaging specific Stakeholders or Stakeholder groups can be identified. By using a range of techniques, various stakeholders can be engaged. Also, the Project Partners are not limited to using one engagement technique at a time.

**Table 3. Techniques based on chosen approach**

APPROACH		TECHNIQUE <sup>5</sup>
INNOVATE COLLABORATE CONSULT	=>	Joint venture or partnership External advisory council Collaboration workshop Joint research Stakeholder engagement summit Focus groups Workshop
MESSAGE ADVOCATE	=>	Sustainability report Survey/Questionnaire Town hall meeting Mass e-mail or newsletter Social media outreach Conference Focus groups
MONITOR	=>	Marketing campaign and tracking Online and social media monitoring Subscription to Stakeholder newsletter or blog

However, the art of Stakeholder engagement does not actually lie in which technique is chosen, but in how well the technique is matched to the issue, Stakeholder(s), and situation. To better choose the technique, the following questions should be considered:

- **Familiarity:** How well do you know the issue and the Stakeholder(s) involved? What has the relationship been in the past? What research and pre-work has been done already?
- **Frequency:** Is this one meeting, multiple meetings, or an ongoing dialogue with no defined end?
- **Guidance/Facilitation:** Will the engagement be managed directly by the Project Partner or will it be facilitated by a third party?
- **Participant Profile:** Does the engagement involve one representative, many from the same organizations, or representatives from many different organizations? Are these senior decisionmakers, impacted or concerned citizens, potential plaintiffs, etc.?
- **Complexity:** Does the engagement involve one issue or multiple issues? What is the level of seriousness, potential impacts, etc.?
- **Trust/Credibility:** How much trust exists between the Project Partner and Stakeholder(s)? What credibility does each have with the other?

For example, if the chosen technique is a verbal exchange with Stakeholders, the pros and cons of various types of conversations should be taken into the consideration. Decide which approach best matches the objectives of the engagement, including online discussions, teleconferences, webinars, one-on-one meetings, or group meetings, forums, or events.

In choosing several techniques, consider how certain elements influence the intended engagement and might change the conversation. Think about the selected Stakeholder groups, and attempt to

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<sup>5</sup> Note: the list of techniques is a rough example and cannot be taken as an exhaustive list

anticipate their perceptions of the criteria that follow below. Then adjust the plans, where necessary. While the stakes are particularly high for in-person meetings, these considerations apply broadly.

In choosing the technique is necessary to provide so that everyone is to feel that their interests are included. This creates the feeling of ownership about the outcomes of the project and though increases the interest of Stakeholders to provide for the project. The successful completion of a project usually depends on how the Stakeholders view it. Their requirements, expectations, perceptions, personal agendas and concerns will influence the project, shape what success looks like, and impact the outcomes that can be achieved.

The project Inter Ventures has already described meetings as one of the compulsory methods of Stakeholder engagement. However, the techniques to carry through these meetings is left to decide for the Project Partners. The compulsory meetings held within the project Inter Ventures and proposed techniques are brought out in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Compulsory Stakeholder meetings determined by the project Inter Ventures and proposed techniques**

Stage	Meeting	Aim of the meeting	Participants	Techniques
Period 1	A kick-off meeting	To <b>introduce the project, disseminate learnings</b> on the evolution of border region SME ecosystems, <b>select participants of forthcoming interregional events</b>	Project Partner and RSG members	Workshop
	Regional Situation Analyse Webinar	To provide for the Regional Situation Analyse in each region - a <b>moderated regional situation and needs analysis event</b> for RSG members, combining <b>online lectures and Q&amp;A sessions</b> held by AE BR; on-site discussion and group work moderated by internal and external experts of PPs	Project Partner, AE BR, RSG members, Internal and external experts of the Project Partners	Workshop Brainstorming Focus Groups
Period 2	Follow up RSG meeting	To discuss the lesson learnt in the two <b>Thematic Study Visits</b> , review the <b>Thematic Portfolios</b> , analyse the applicable <b>best practicies</b> and knowledge	Project Partners and RSG members	Workshop Word Café
Period 3	First regional Stakeholder Workshop	To inform Stakeholders on the process, discuss aspirations, <b>review applicable good practices</b> of the regional Applicability Report, and <b>identify potential interim policy improvements</b>	Project Partners, RSG members and PI owners	Workshop Focus Groups
Period 4	RSG Action Planning Webinars	To discuss the <b>draft actions and sustainability issues</b> proposed by 3rd Interregional Meeting; as well as hold <b>moderated action planning workshop</b> . The webinar will contain <b>online lectures and Q&amp;A sessions</b> held by AE BR and on-site discussion and group work	Project Partner, RSG members, AE BR, Internal and external experts of the	Workshop



		moderated by thematic internal and external experts of PPs	Project Partners	
	Regional Policy Workshops	To <b>monitor the implementation of Regional Policy Recommendations</b> prepared by the previous round of Regional Policy Workshops in Period 3	Project Partners, RSG members and PI owners	Workshop

However, apart from the compulsory meetings, we strongly recommend **further events to be included in the planning in order to have a regular contact with Stakeholders.**

There is an abundance of participatory techniques that can be used in the meetings in addition to those brought out in the Table above. The list below includes some of the participatory techniques:

- **Problem tree analysis:** it is a pictorial representation of a problem, its causes and its consequences. Both causes and consequences are fitted into the diagram on a hierarchical preference basis.
- **Speed geeking:** to quickly view a number of presentations within a fixed period of time
- round table,
- **Birds of a feather:** meetings with members interested in a particular issue. They carry out discussions without any planned agenda
- **Dotmocracy (dot-voting):** participants vote on their chosen options using a limited number of stickers or marks with pen
- **Fishbowl:** a form of a dialogue which can be used when discussing topics within large groups. The advantage is that it allows the entire group to participate in a conversation

Logistics are an important aspect of planning the Stakeholder engagement. As follows we provide an illustrative list with points to cover to help with organizing the event:

- Develop an agenda focused on objectives and outcomes (see also Annex 5.1)
- Develop rules of engagement, confidentiality, and a decision-making process
- Create evaluation criteria and measures for success
- Develop a feedback plan and mechanism (see also Annex 5.3)
- Set up channels of ongoing communication (Twitter feed, voting platform, white boards)
- Determine if facilitation is needed, and select a facilitator
- Secure an appropriate facility (if necessary)
- Distribute invitations with practical information and meeting agenda well in advance to participants
- Plan for catering, paying attention to special needs or diets
- Create engagement materials
- Communicate clear objectives, scope, and roles for participants
- Assign participants roles and responsibilities
- Decide on how photos are taken
- Who takes the minutes (see also Annex 5.4)
- Prepare Attendance sheets (see also Annex 5.2)
- Agree upon specific dissemination rules

### 3.4. STEP 4: IMPLEMENT ENGAGEMENT PLAN

There are several aspects to keep in mind during the implementation phase.

#### INFORMING

It is necessary to **inform the Stakeholders in advance** about the project and the possibilities to participate in the project. In communicating the project to the Stakeholders, it must be kept in mind that **different Stakeholder groups require a different approach in communication**. However, the proper invitation to a Stakeholder should include the following:

- the purpose and scope of the engagement;
- the engagement process and the expected timelines;
- what the Stakeholder is expected to contribute;
- logistical and practical information about the engagement process.

Moreover, the invitations to the Stakeholders should **be personal and not generic**. Different factors should be considered in order to find the most effective means. Examples of methods currently used are social networks, media, mailing lists, telephone calls and personal visits.

#### FACILITATION

For a successful engagement with the Stakeholders facilitation truly counts. To benefit most from the Stakeholder engagement focus on the following points:

- **Help Stakeholders to prepare:** make sure that everyone who joins in is aware of the goals, format, envisaged contribution, and any useful background information so the discussion will be as productive as possible
- **Share Stakeholder expectations:** share feedback from the earlier goal-setting consultation process, or invite Stakeholders to share their expectations for the engagement
- **Allow for equal contribution:** encourage less-vocal Stakeholders to participate in the conversation; create a space in which this is possible and comfortable; respect each party's right to observe quietly if they choose
- **Focus the discussion:** dialogues can veer off-topic if not properly focused. Stick to the agenda and remain within the issue's scope
- **Manage cultural dynamics:** be wary of potential cultural misunderstandings and be prepared to manage any that arise
- **Mitigate tension:** certain topics can prove controversial or provocative, and unexpected dynamics or rivalries may surface among participants. Thorough mapping and preparation will help, but anticipating a range of outcomes is essential

In implementing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, it has to be kept in mind that there are expected two outcomes from this exercise within the project Inter Ventures. Firstly, based on the results from Stakeholder engagement process, the project Inter Ventures will identify success criteria and capacity development needs of SMEs' to promote their integration into international production and innovation chains and interregional value creation. Secondly, the shortages and development opportunities of institutional capacities, cooperation structures and SME support schemes for boosting internationalisation in targeted border regions will be identified.

#### DOCUMENT THE ENGAGEMENT

In order to measure success and build for future activities, the following should be put in writing during the engagement: the purpose and aims of the engagement; the methods used; the participants; a summary of noted Stakeholder concerns, expectations, and perceptions; a summary of discussions; and a robust list of outputs (decisions, actions, proposals, and recommendations). This documentary record should be shared with all participants.

### 3.5. STEP 5: ASSESS THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

At the end of each cycle of the Stakeholder engagement process, the whole situation and its outputs should be analysed, as well as the reasons of the chosen decisions and actions should be defined. Assessment of the Stakeholder engagement process is necessary to ensure that the chosen approach is successful. One of the tools to prepare the assessment of the Stakeholder engagement process is the **Evaluation Form** (see Annex 5.3.) that will be filled in by each Stakeholder after every event. These Evaluation Forms should be analysed to assess the Stakeholder engagement process.

The outcome of Evaluation Form analysis provides input for the following:

- achievement of objectives and expected results;
- effectiveness of allocated resources and means (e.g. budget and expertise);
- internal and external acceptance of outcomes.

The assessment report should include the following assessments:

- commitment and integration;
- purpose, scope and Stakeholder participation;
- process (planning, preparing, engaging, reviewing and improving);
- outputs and outcomes;
- reporting.

To facilitate the process, a list of indicators should be created for the sake of comparison with previously defined objectives. The proposed indicators are presented in *Table 5* below.

**Table 5. Proposed indicators to measure the Stakeholder engagement process]**

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Proposed indicator</b>
Commitment and integration	Planned Stakeholder commitment (how much they provide input to the process) versus actual Stakeholder commitment
Purpose, scope and Stakeholder participation	Planned number of participants versus the actual number of participants
Process	Planned process versus actual process
Outputs and outcomes	Planned outputs versus actual outputs
Reporting	Planned reporting versus actual reporting

### 3.6. STEP 6: REACT TO ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Organizations often conduct Stakeholder engagements and then fail to document the results and act transparently on the information gained through the exchanges. This step – reacting to engagement results – means that based on the assessment conducted on Step 5, the **adopted Stakeholder engagement Plan should be revised and improvements should be made** into the plan where needed. This applies to each individual engagement. For ongoing, repeated interactions, the action plan from one engagement should directly inform the planning and execution of the next.

#### **CREATE AN OVERVIEW**

Refer back to the written engagement notes and consider the entire range of issues that came up during the Stakeholder engagement. For each issue, prepare a response that explains the rationale behind the decision or next step — especially if the response is to take no action.

#### **BUILD A PLAN**

The overview is a foundation for the new action plan. For each potential next step, the concerns and perceptions stakeholders expressed during the engagement, as well as key discussion points should be considered. Each action should define roles and responsibilities for implementation, along with milestones and a realistic timeline for completion.

### 3.7. STEP 7: MEASURE AND REPORT PROGRESS

As a last step, the **follow up on the Stakeholder engagement Plan**, created in Step 6 should also be used as a progress report on goals and objectives. Think back to the original objectives and ambition. Use what was learned from the engagement to address the short-term or long-term goals that have been previously set. **Incorporate successes into the Action Plan and analyse any misses or failures** to help to set more realistic goals in the future.

The measuring and reporting of results of every engagement activity have the following benefits:

- Increased trust and confidence across the project community;
- Increased certainty and pace of progress;
- Clearer understanding of remaining resistance;
- More robust risk management;
- Sustainability compliance management;
- Market development;
- Innovation;
- Strategy improvement.

However, not measuring and reporting the progress may have the following risks:

- Uncertainty of outcome;
- Likelihood of reactive planning;
- Emotional ineptness;
- Diversion and distraction of resources;
- Silo thinking, factions and division amongst all levels: individual, group, organisational;
- Unprofessional and unethical behaviours.

In this stage, an ongoing engagement to tackle strategic or systemic issues of high value to the organization should be considered. It is good practice to **maintain ongoing engagement**, for example via Stakeholder panels and advisory boards. Here are some key considerations before establishing a more formal, ongoing Stakeholder engagement mechanism:

- **Develop a clear mandate:** there are many reasons to bring Stakeholders together on a regular basis, from providing strategic input to co-creating a new initiative. The point is to select one and then use it to guide the entire process, including the establishment of a mutual understanding as to how the feedback will be used
- **Composition:** for an ongoing advisory function, trade-offs must be made in terms of breadth and depth on issues, as well as the diversity of the country of origin, gender, opinion, and expertise. A clear mandate will help to select the right balance
- **Payment:** if you seek an ongoing commitment from Stakeholders, financial compensation will quickly become a consideration. Common practice includes paying honoraria and travel arrangements<sup>6</sup>. Whatever approach is adopted, transparency is key.
- **Confidentiality and disclosure:** there should be clear guidelines for confidentiality and the sharing of decisions and key discussion points. Compelling and conflicting arguments for confidentiality and for transparent disclosure may be encountered. Pick the one that makes the most sense, and stick to the agreed procedures.
- **Effectiveness:** term limits for panelists can foster the evolution and diversity of perspectives. Panel members should be reviewed regularly for effectiveness - at least annually.

Finally, **communication with Stakeholders as transparently as possible** is the key. From the Action Plan, build a public reporting document that tells the whole story and can be tailored to specific

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<sup>6</sup> Please bear in mind that in this project it is not possible to honorarium for the RSG members. Only the travel cost of the Thematic Study Visits and the Interregional meeting are eligible

audiences. Use this opportunity to demonstrate how the engagement activities and Stakeholders affect the project — and their lives. Finally, be sure to invite further **Stakeholder feedback** to improve the engagement strategy in future.

## 4. CONCLUSION

A successful Stakeholder engagement process is a vital requirement to achieve the required outputs of the project. The aim of the project Inter Ventures is to **promote the internationalization of SMEs in EU border regions, thus contributing to their growth and increased competitiveness**. On the regional level, the aim of the project is to **change the targeted policy instrument**. Though, the Stakeholder engagement in this project is necessary to support this policy influencing.

This guide about Stakeholder engagement has been designed by the Association of the European Border Regions (AEBR) to support the project Inter Ventures approach on internationalization of SMEs in cross-border areas by providing a tool to Project Partners to better understand what is a Stakeholder, why it is necessary to involve Stakeholders, what would the Project Partners gain from these Stakeholders while pursuing the objectives of the project Inter Ventures, and finally, how to engage / to interact with the Stakeholders.

This guide introduced the 7 steps of an effective Stakeholder engagement process:

1. setting engagement objectives;
2. identifying and assessing stakeholders;
3. developing engagement plan and techniques;
4. implementation of engagement plan;
5. assessment of the engagement process;
6. responding to the engagement results;
7. measuring and reporting progress.

By following these seven steps, Project Partners can ensure a successful Stakeholder engagement and so achieve the planned project outcomes. The latter is because through a proper Stakeholder engagement, the Stakeholders are more likely to feel ownership over the project and are therefore more likely to assist the Project Partners and help to implement project recommendations.

## 5. ANNEXES

### 5.1. AGENDA

#### AGENDA

Title of the event, location and date

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Tour the Table => Stakeholder presentation
3. Meeting objectives
4. Discussions / Decisions
5. Conclusions / Next Steps
6. Next Meeting

DAY N* (and date/time)	Program	Presenter / Moderator
	<b>Coffee Break</b>	
	<b>Lunch Break</b>	
	<b>Coffee Break</b>	
	<b>Conclusions</b>	



**5.2. ATTENDANCE LIST**

**ATTENDANCE LIST**  
Title of the event, location and date

Name	Organization	Contact Details (e-mail; phone)	Signature

**5.3. EVALUATION FORM**

**EVALUATION FORM**  
**Title of the event, location and date**

Please fill in the following form to give us feedback about */title of the event/* held in */location, date/*. Your feedback is important for us.

1. Please indicate your satisfaction in general with the presentations

Name of the presentation	Very satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied

Please provide your comments / remarks / points of improvement below

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2. Please indicate your satisfaction with the event in general

	Fully agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Do not agree
Programme was well thought through				
Moderators did their job well				
Overall organizations was good				
Information provided was useful				
Am satisfied with the outcomes				

Please provide your comments / remarks / points of improvement below

.....

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5.4. MINUTES

**MINUTES**

Title of the event, location and date

<b>DAY N* (and date/time)</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Presenter / Moderator</b>
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
<b>Coffee Break</b>		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
<b>Lunch Break</b>		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
<b>Coffee Break</b>		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
MINUTES/ DECISIONS / ACTIONS		
<b>Conclusions</b>		

**5.5. EXAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION**

**General data**

- 1. Name of the respondent
- 2. Position
- 3. Organisation
- 4. Field of activity/ sector (if applicable)
- 5. Do you have any experience in SME internationalization?
- 6. In case you do, please explain on the lines below

.....

.....

**Networks and members**

This part of the questionnaire concentrates on identifying the members in the networks. Please be precise in your answer.

Please name up to 10 people outside of your organization with whom you have the most contact concerning the SME internationalization (incl. e-mails; meetings; phone calls; fax; texts etc)

First name	Surname	Name of organization	E-mail	Field of activity / sector

## **5.6. SAMPLE LIST OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS**

### **Government, for example,**

- Policy makers and policy consultant;
- Local, regional and national public authorities (i.e. municipalities, regions, ministries);
- Managing Authorities;
- local policymakers;
- opinion leaders

### **SMEs**

- Local and regional SMEs;
- Partners of local and regional SMEs (as secondary Stakeholders);
- Associations of SMEs;
- Sectoral agencies and institutions (e.g. business sector and entrepreneurship agents);

### **Community**

- Residents in the municipality, region or border area
- Chambers of commerce
- Resident associations
- Schools
- Community organizations
- Special interest groups

### **Academia**

- Research Institutions
- Universities
- Universities of Applied Sciences
- Vocational Schools