



Building relationships with the stakeholders related to your new excursion product is an important and ongoing process. It can take some time, but will help you create a unique product.

Read on to find out more about stakeholder engagement...

Why build a stakeholder group?

To ensure that your excursion achieves its sustainable aims – whether it's increasing benefits to communities, helping to protect the environment or promoting local culture and traditions, you will need to consult with the people who have a 'stake' in this new product.

Developing these relationships will also demonstrate that you respect all stakeholders as partners in building a sustainable excursion.

Stakeholder selection

Who your stakeholders are will depend on what you are aiming to achieve. You may already have a specific excursion in mind, in which case you should target stakeholders relevant to this area.

Alternatively, you may want to use the group to generate new ideas, in which case it might be a good idea to cast your net as widely as possible to get a good range of ideas and opinions.

What background do your stakeholders have?

Phone and visit, if possible, individual organisation staff or representatives to introduce yourselves and pre-discuss your idea for a sustainable excursion and what you want to do, and find out about what they are doing. Identify which perspective each stakeholder group you contact has on sustainable tourism delivery – i.e. environmental, social, political, commercial, economic interests.

These initial conversations with stakeholders can be used to build a matrix (an example of which can be found in the Creating a New Excursion tool).

Create a mutually beneficial relationship

It is important to understand what your stakeholders want and need. Remember that it needs to be a mutually beneficial relationship. Some questions to

consider... Do they want to have direct contact with customers? Some people may want the opportunity to interact with customers (giving talks, guiding etc) while others might be happy to do demonstrations but not want to engage directly. Some communities might wish to be involved in tourism but don't necessarily want to have visits – for example, they may just want to offer crafts or other produce to sell to customers.

How many visitors do they want to have and for how long? They might only want to receive small groups. This can be difficult if you have minimum pax numbers, but you could consider splitting the group so that half go and do an alternative activity and then swap round. They may only want to be involved once every few weeks or even once a month. If so, are there similar businesses/communities that you could link with and rotate visits?

Defining rules and expectations

Also avoid raising expectations, especially when talking with potential beneficiaries of your new excursion (i.e. a shop / restaurant owner or village community group). Over promising on the benefits (financial or social) of a new excursion opportunity could lead to animosity or mistrust.

It is important to realise that a utopia of gathering all stakeholders' feedback and creating something that pleases everyone, in reality, will almost never be possible. You will need to analyse the information gathered from researching demand, your customers and each of your stakeholders and create a balance. Present your ideas back to stakeholders showing where their ideas and suggestions have been incorporated, and ask for their feedback.

Being open, honest and maintaining regular communication will benefit all parties in the long run.