

Local Community Engagement: Ocean Energy Best Practices

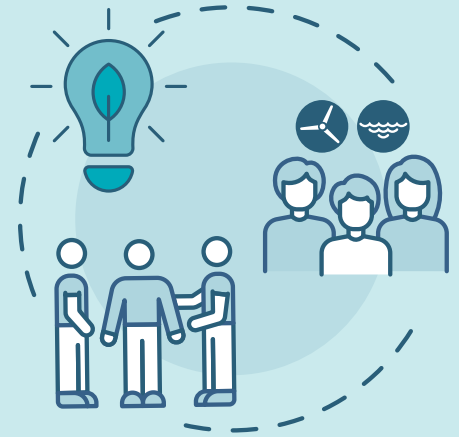
Why engage with locals?

Ocean energy projects enjoy strong support from local communities. Locals generally view these projects as sustainable solutions for their energy needs which offer economic opportunities and fight climate change.

But local support can be further strengthened – and opposition pre-empted – if developers engage well with the community during project’s development.

Quality community engagement fosters trust, enhances public acceptance and minimises conflicts. This delivers faster and smoother permitting and reduces both project costs and risks.

Ocean energy developers already engage actively with local communities. This guide compiles the best practices used in existing ocean energy projects, to help developers design their own community engagement strategy.



Best practices for engaging with local communities

STEP 1

Map stakeholders thoroughly and identify local issues



- Ensure that all stakeholder groups are included, such as public authorities, representatives of marine and coastal activities, environmental organisations etc.
- Identify community development issues and potential environmental and societal impacts of your project.
- Involve experts (e.g. scientists and academia) to provide factual information and credibility.

STEP 2

Engage early and regularly



- Engage with stakeholders as early as possible and throughout the project.
- Provide a small amount of information on a regular basis, rather than a large amount of information on an ad hoc basis or only at the start or end of the project. This creates trust and reduces information overload.

STEP 3

Share information transparently



- Share information about the project through many different media to broaden outreach: newsletters, information pages on websites, social media and newspapers.
- Educate the public on the technology and present the project scope and objectives clearly. A clear high-level understanding of the project will improve social acceptance.
- Present tangible examples of environmental and socio-economic benefits in other ocean energy projects to increase public support.
- Be adaptive, transparent, honest and consistent in your communication – do not promise things you are not sure about. Overpromising breaks trust and can cause conflicts.
- Anticipate fake news by acknowledging potential scientific uncertainties that the local community might misunderstand, and transparently explain the real consequences of the uncertainty. If fake news arises, publish counterarguments as quickly as possible.

STEP 4

Meet in person with locals and key stakeholders



- Organise public meetings open to the whole community. This gives an opportunity to address any questions or concerns directly.
- Organise specific meetings with key stakeholders to integrate them in the project development and identify solutions to potential conflicts.
- Consult with the community and include them in decision-making as much as possible. This ensures that project objectives are in line with community needs.
- Identify a mediator who is trusted by and part of the community and can relay information.
- The mediator and media should pass on factual and verified information. To achieve this, ensure that the mediator and media understand the information regarding the project, respond to any issues raised by the mediator or media and maintain a manageable number of close interlocutors to share information with to avoid misunderstandings (e.g. one journalist per media).
- As an alternative to identifying a mediator, you can create a “steering committee” with representatives of each key stakeholder, public authorities and project developers to support decision-making and information sharing. A steering committee is an efficient place to discuss issues and bottlenecks related to the project. It can also easily liaise with the community.