



Community Engagement Toolkit

for Clean Energy Innovation

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This toolkit provides practical tools to help clean energy innovators integrate community engagement into the design, implementation and scaling of energy access projects. The tools support businesses to:

- understand local contexts
- identify and engage relevant stakeholders
- design technologies and services collaboratively
- anticipate risks and barriers to adoption
- build long-term community partnerships

The toolkit is designed to be used alongside the Community Engagement Guide and can be applied throughout the lifecycle of energy innovation projects.

Community Engagement Readiness Check

Purpose

To help project teams assess whether they are prepared to engage communities effectively and inclusively before introducing a new technology or service.

Instructions

Before beginning community engagement activities, review the questions below. If several answers are “No” or “Not yet,” additional preparation may be needed.

Readiness questions

Question	Yes	No	Notes
Do we understand the local context in which the technology will be used?			
Have we identified the different community groups who may be affected by the project?			
Are we engaging communities early enough to influence project design?			
Have we considered how different groups (for example, women, youth or local businesses) may experience the technology differently?			
Do we have mechanisms that allow communities to provide feedback throughout the project lifecycle?			
Are we prepared to adapt technologies or services in response to community feedback?			
Have we identified local partners who can support engagement and communication?			
Do we have sufficient time and resources allocated for meaningful engagement?			

Interpreting the results

Mostly “Yes”

You are likely well prepared to begin engagement activities.

Several “No” responses

Consider using the tools in this toolkit (context mapping, stakeholder mapping and engagement planning) to strengthen your approach.

Output

A quick assessment of whether the project team is ready to begin meaningful community engagement.

Toolkit Structure

The toolkit contains **six practical tools** aligned with the stages of project development.

Tool	Purpose
Context Mapping Tool	Understand the social, economic and institutional environment
Community Actor Mapping Tool	Identify relevant community actors and understand local power dynamics
Community Asset Mapping Tool	Identify local strengths and resources
Participatory Design Tool	Involve communities in shaping solutions
Engagement Planning Tool	Plan engagement activities across the project lifecycle
Monitoring and Feedback Tool	Gather and respond to community feedback

Common Community Engagement Pitfalls

Even well-intentioned projects can encounter challenges when engaging communities. The issues below are common across energy access and development initiatives.

Recognising these risks early can help project teams design more effective engagement processes.

Pitfall 1 – Engaging communities too late

Engagement sometimes begins after technologies have already been designed. At this stage, communities can provide feedback but have little influence over key decisions.

How to avoid this

Begin engagement during the early research and design stages of a project.

Pitfall 2 – Treating communities as a single group

Communities are rarely homogeneous. Different groups may have different needs, priorities and levels of influence.

How to avoid this

Use stakeholder mapping to identify diverse community actors, including women's groups, youth organisations, local businesses and technical specialists.

Pitfall 3 – Listening without responding

Collecting feedback is important, but engagement loses credibility if communities do not see how their input influences decisions.

How to avoid this

Create a feedback loop: share results of consultations, explain decisions and show how projects have been adjusted.

Pitfall 4 – Overlooking local knowledge and capacity

Projects sometimes overlook existing skills, networks or informal systems that could support implementation.

How to avoid this

Use asset mapping to identify local knowledge, technical capacity and community organisations that can support project delivery.

Pitfall 5 – Underestimating time and resources required

Meaningful engagement requires time, facilitation and sometimes local partnerships.

How to avoid this

Include engagement activities in project plans and allocate sufficient time and resources.

Output

Awareness of common engagement risks and practical strategies for addressing them.

Tool 1 – Context Mapping Tool

Purpose

To understand the social, economic and institutional conditions in which the technologies will operate.

Key Questions

Economic context

- How do households currently pay for energy?
- What are typical income cycles and payment patterns?

Institutional context

- Who makes decisions about infrastructure and services?
- Which local organisations influence decisions about energy services or infrastructure?

Social context

- Who currently manages energy use in households or businesses?
- Are there gender or age dynamics affecting technology adoption?

Historical context

- Have similar projects been introduced before?
- How were they received?

Output

A short context summary that informs technology design, pricing models and distribution strategies.

Tool 2 – Community Actor Mapping Tool

Purpose

To identify the range of actors involved in or affected by the project.

Step 1 – Identify community actors and partners

Examples include:

- local leaders
- women's groups
- youth groups
- farmers
- local technicians
- small businesses
- community organisations
- local government

Start by identifying the groups that may influence the project or be affected by it.. Consider both formal authorities and informal community networks.

Example (partially completed)

Community actor / partner	Influence	Interest	Engagement approach
Local leaders	High	High	Early consultation and ongoing dialogue
Women's groups	Medium	High	Participatory design workshops
Local technicians	Medium	Medium	Training and maintenance partnerships

Your Project

Community actor / partner	Influence	Interest	Engagement approach

Output

A map identifying community groups and partners that should be prioritised for engagement.

Tool 3 – Community Asset Mapping Tool

Purpose

To identify the knowledge, skills, networks and resources that already exist within communities and that could support project design, implementation and long-term operation.

Start by identifying strengths and resources that already exist within the community rather than focusing only on needs or gaps.

Assets to consider

Asset type	Examples
Local knowledge	Understanding of environmental conditions, seasonal patterns and local energy needs
Technical skills	Local technicians, repair capacity or experience maintaining equipment
Social networks	Community organisations, cooperatives, associations or informal support networks
Local infrastructure	Buildings, meeting spaces, communication channels or existing service points
Cultural practices	Local norms, routines and cultural practices that may influence technology use

Output

A list of community assets that can support project implementation, partnerships and long-term sustainability.

Tool 4 – Participatory Design Tool

Purpose

To involve communities in shaping technologies and services so that solutions reflect local needs, practices and priorities.

Possible methods

Method	Description
Design workshops	Community members discuss needs, priorities and possible solutions.
Prototype testing	Users trial early versions of technologies and provide feedback.
Scenario discussions	Communities explore how technologies might fit into everyday routines and activities.

Example Questions

- How would this technology fit into daily routines?
- What features would improve usability or affordability or accessibility?
- What barriers might prevent adoption or long-term use?

Output

Insights from community discussions and testing that inform improvements to technology design, service delivery or implementation strategies.

Tool 5 – Engagement Planning Tool

Purpose

To plan community engagement activities across the project lifecycle and ensure that communities remain involved as the project develops and evolves.

Engagement stages

Project stage	Possible engagement activities
Early research	Community consultations, context assessments and stakeholder mapping
Design phase	Participatory design workshops and user testing
Implementation	Community meetings, partnerships with local organisations and ongoing communication activities
Operation and maintenance	Training, local technical support and user engagement
Monitoring and learning	Community feedback mechanisms and participatory evaluation

Output

A simple engagement plan outlining engagement activities, timelines and responsibilities.

Tool 6 – Monitoring and Feedback Tool

Purpose

To create an ongoing feedback loop in which communities share their experiences and project teams respond by adapting technologies, services or implementation approaches.

Feedback and learning process

Stage	Description
Gather feedback	Collect feedback from community members through meetings, surveys, advisory groups or digital platforms.
Review insights	Project teams analyse feedback to identify problems, barriers or opportunities for improvement.
Adapt the project	Adjust technologies, services or implementation approaches in response to feedback.
Share changes	Communicate changes with communities and invite further feedback.

Possible feedback mechanisms

Mechanism	Description
Community feedback meetings	Regular discussions with community members and project partners
Community scorecards	Residents evaluate project performance and service quality
Local advisory groups	Ongoing dialogue between project teams and community representatives
Digital feedback tools	Messaging platforms, mobile surveys or online feedback channels

Key Questions

- Are the technologies being used as intended?
- What challenges or barriers are emerging?
- What changes could improve usability, affordability or reliability?
- What additional support might users need?
- Are the groups most affected by the project actively involved in feedback and decision-making processes? If not, how can engagement be improved?

Output

An ongoing feedback and adaptation cycle that allows project teams to refine technologies and services while maintaining dialogue with communities.

Community Engagement Canvas (Summary Tool)

The toolkit also includes the Community Engagement Canvas, which combines the tools above into a single planning framework.

The canvas helps project teams consider:

Project context
Stakeholders
Community assets
Engagement strategy
Participation approach
Implementation plan
Monitoring and feedback
Risks and mitigation

Teams can complete the canvas during project planning workshops.

When to Use The Toolkit

The tools can be applied at different stages of a project.

Early stage

Use context mapping and stakeholder mapping.

Design stage

Use asset mapping and participatory design tools.

Implementation stage

Use engagement planning.

Operational stage

Use monitoring and feedback tools.

Key Principle

Community engagement is most effective when it is integrated throughout the project lifecycle rather than treated as a one-off consultation exercise.