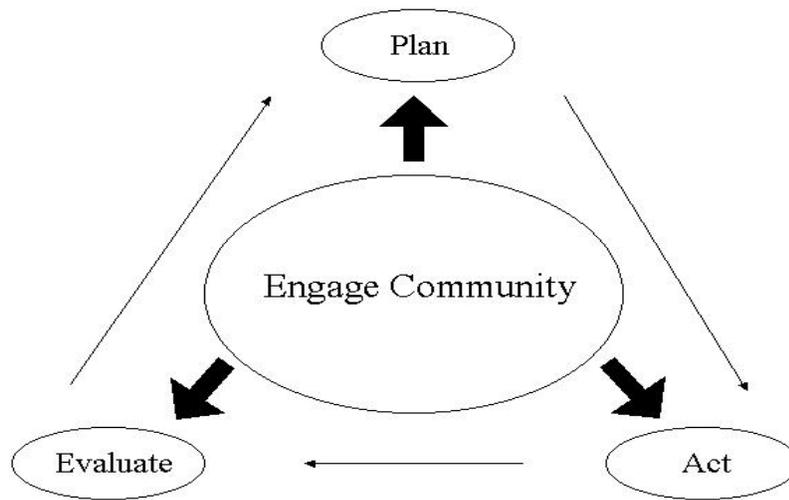


## Chapter 2: ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Engaging the necessary members of the local community is one of the most critical parts in the process of advancing community sustainable forestry. However, as Figure 2-1 illustrates, engaging community members does not occur at only one stage in the process. Rather, it is done in concert with all the other steps in the process. Engaging and re-engaging the community has to happen throughout the process of becoming a sustainable forest community. The broader the participation base, the greater the support for the process will be and the better the chance for long-term success.



**Figure 2-1. Engaging the Community in Plan-Act-Evaluate Process**

The process of involving the community is often called engaging the stakeholders. There are many guides on how to engage the public or other stakeholders in a community process. There are also guides on initiating community indicator projects. A number of these documents are listed in the *Additional Resources* section at the end of this chapter and in Appendix F. Rather than attempt to duplicate what is already well documented, this chapter highlights key aspects of this step related to forestry communities and provides suggestions on how indicators can be useful tools for engaging stakeholders.

### **Who are the stakeholders in a forest community?**

Especially in a forest community, some of the key people and organizations to include are:

- Biologists and ecologists
- Community development organizations
- Conservation groups
- Educational institutions (e.g., universities, colleges)

- Farmers
- Forest product firms (e.g., saw mills)
- Foresters
- Health care providers
- Land owners
- Local environmental authorities
- Local or regional media
- Parks and other recreational authorities
- Public officials
- Tribal authorities, etc.

### **Why is it important to engage all the stakeholders?**

The long-term sustainability of a community's forest resources depends upon the decisions and actions of many different individuals and organizations. For example, the level of harvesting of timber, the impacts of tourism and the growth in second home ownership are all important factors in the health of forestlands. However, in most communities, there are different individuals or organizations responsible for each of these activities. If different groups are working at cross-purposes to each other, the community and its forest resources will suffer in the long run.

In addition, indicators are most useful if they are part of a decision-making process. Developing indicators of sustainable forestry for a community needs to be done in partnership with the individuals and organizations that have the decision-making authority. This includes the local government, but, depending on the community, may include state and federal government agencies (if there is state or federal forestland), and private landowners.

### **How to engage stakeholders**

Any organization or a group of people can initiate sustainable forestry project in a community. The group can be a non-profit organization, a local government or just a group of interested or concerned individuals. Regardless of who initiates the process, it is important to take the time to involve the wider community. A sustainable forestry initiative needs to be developed collaboratively by the people who make up the community. It cannot be created by one group within the community and imposed upon the rest of the community. It cannot be designed by a consultant or implemented by outside “experts” hired specifically for the project. Sustainable forestry is a continuous process which can be successful only if implemented every day by the people who live and work in the community, because at the end of the day the experts go home and the community is left to carry on.

The most successful forestry initiatives are usually based on partnerships between people and organizations with diverse backgrounds, interests and expertise. Such partnerships help ensure that everyone’s interests and views are taken into account; they raise awareness and build community capacity.

In their *Sustainable Forest Management Community Handbook for the Great Lakes Region* McDonough et.al. (2002) point out that there are typically three levels of community participation for a successful sustainable forestry initiative:

- A core group or steering committee - a small core group, typically between five and ten members who launch the initiative, meet fairly often and provide leadership for the initiative.
- A larger working group - includes the steering committee members but also a diverse set of community members, who inform the steering committee about the community's concerns and needs. Its size can vary but typically is between 30 and 50 people.
- The entire community - everyone else who is part of the community but is not involved in the steering committee or working group. Both the steering committee and the working group have to keep the entire community informed about the initiative and its progress and provide ways for the larger community to give feedback on the initiative and possibly become involved, providing support and resources to keep the initiative alive and relevant to the community.

There are numerous ways to engage the community in terms of logistics – setting up meeting in a common community area, using the media to inform residents, inviting an inspirational speaker, providing food and drinks, etc. For more information on the logistics refer to the additional resources listed at the end of this chapter.

In summary, the process of engaging the entire community is critical because it builds trust and local ownership – keys for success of any sustainable community initiative. It is important to remember that this process is not easy and will take time. Some community indicator projects begin with this step, others begin with preliminary indicator development and then engage the wider community. There is no right or wrong way – simply choose what works best for your community.

### **Using Indicators to Engage the Community**

Indicators of sustainable forestry are a valuable tool for a community because they help raise awareness about key issues of concern in the community and thus allow focusing efforts and resources on addressing these concerns. Whatever the role and audience of the indicators a truly effective set of sustainable forestry indicators should always lead to making better decisions and taking action to address the problems. Creating better ties to action is perhaps the most critical as well as most challenging task on the agenda for all indicator programs.

### **Useful Indicator-Related Exercises to Apply**

There are several different ways that indicators can be used to engage stakeholders in a sustainable forestry process. The following exercises and material from this ToolKit may be useful at this stage in the indicator development process. Note that not all of these actually use ‘indicators.’ However, they are included here because they have proven useful as a first step for many communities developing indicators of sustainability.

1. ***Forest-Related Sustainability Definitions - Appendix A, Section A-1.*** One of the first challenges in engaging diverse stakeholders in a community is developing a common language with which to discuss issues. This is especially the case when the topic being discussed is *sustainable forestry* or *sustainable forest management* since these terms are used in many different, sometimes conflicting ways. The definitions in Appendix A, Section 1 can be used as a discussion tool to get people with different viewpoints to begin to understand how those viewpoints overlap. A useful exercise is to ask people to read through the definitions and discuss in a small group which definition each person agrees with and why.

2. ***Examples of Sustainable Forestry Related Goals - Appendix G.*** The list of sustainable forest management goals that have been developed by other communities and organizations can also be useful as discussion starters. Small group discussions about the goals can help participants understand each other's viewpoints.

3. ***Case Studies - Appendix D.*** The case studies in Appendix D describe how three different communities undertook indicator projects using the Montréal Process Criteria and Indicators as a foundation of the project. Reading these and discussing them as a group is a useful exercise for communities considering beginning an indicator project.

4. ***Creating Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Community Development.*** This exercise is useful for communities interested in creating economic development plans and projects that are more aligned with sustainability than traditional economic development activities.

### **Useful Resources**

**Sustainable Forest Management Community Handbook for the Great Lakes Region**, by Maureen McDonough, Leigh Ann Spence, and Wendy Hinrichs Sanders, May 2002. An excellent guide to developing a community-based, sustainable forestry initiative. In addition to the section who to engage in the process, the guide includes a number of case studies of communities in the Great Lakes Region that have developed sustainable forestry initiatives and has detailed information about sources of data for indicators. Available at [http://www.lsf.org/pub\\_SFM\\_handbook.html](http://www.lsf.org/pub_SFM_handbook.html).

**The Community Indicators Handbook: Measuring Progress Toward Healthy and Sustainable Communities**, By Redefining Progress, Tyler Norris Associates, and Sustainable Seattle (August 1997, 15 pp.) An excellent guide to community indicator projects in general. Available from Redefining Progress: [www.rprogress.org](http://www.rprogress.org).

**Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place**, 2002, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 842-B-01-003), Office of Water, Washington, DC. This guide focuses on the cultural and social aspects of a community and describes a number of different ways to engage community members in assessing the community and defining a future vision. Includes several case studies

relevant to forest communities. Available from the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information – email address: ncepiwo.one.net.

**User's Guide to Local Level Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management**, by the Canadian Model Forest Network. The guide describes 12 different 'Model Forests' where communities used the MP C&I as a basis for sustainable forest resource management. The guide documents each model forest's approach to initiating a local level indicator program, selecting indicators, gathering data, and using and reporting on indicators. There are lists of relevant publications, complete sets of each model forest's indicators, a comparison of approaches to local level indicators across the model forest network, and contacts for more information. A free copy of the Guide in English or French (specify which) is available from [modelforest@nrcan.gc.ca](mailto:modelforest@nrcan.gc.ca), and the Model Forest Network web site <http://www.modelforest.net/e/home/loca/usersgue.html>.