

Organizational purpose supported through community engagement

Building long-term stakeholder relationships through transparency and on-going consultation serves as a solution-generating tool, says the director of organizational development for BC Hydro.

“[Stakeholder engagement] provides for mutual learning between stakeholders and BC Hydro and it means we make more informed decisions while we build long term, mutually beneficial relationships,” says Tana Speerbrecker. “It helps us to identify solutions, risks and potential costs that we might not have otherwise thought about.”

BC Hydro works closely with BC First Nations groups – whom they consider a unique stakeholder due to their legal status – through the Aboriginal Relations and Negotiations department.

The company works with other stakeholders through a small Corporate Stakeholder Engagement team and Corporate Communications and Public Affairs. The CSE team are also responsible for involving the company’s 4300 employees in the stakeholder engagement process, Speerbrecker explains, providing them with the appropriate resources and tools.

During specific initiatives – especially long term ones – community engagement efforts must be exhaustive.

Through its 6 year Water Use Plan Program (which ran from 1998 to 2004), BC Hydro sought to find ways to make water use – such as domestic water supply, fish and wildlife, recreation, heritage and electrical power needs – more sustainable and cost-effective. The company developed 23 Water Use plans to cover most of the 30 provincial hydroelectric facilities.

The important stakeholder component was the consultative approach, says Speerbrecker, involving input from government agencies, First Nations groups, local citizens and interest groups. The program utilized Consultative Committees, which reached consensus with stakeholders on proposed changes to operations, subsequent required building projects and information-gathering.

“Engagement supports BC Hydro in achieving its purpose – providing reliable power, at low cost, for generations,” says Speerbrecker.

BC Hydro is currently involved in The Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative, a collaboration of numerous Aboriginal, governmental, and environmental organizations. The initiative aims to regenerate the species – now officially classified as endangered after decades of pollution, dam construction and human activity decimated their habitat and stocks – in the Upper Columbia River.

A respectful approach adhering to established principles producing the best stakeholder engagement results, she adds. Thorough follow-up around specific initiatives, and communication after decisions are processual strategies that keep stakeholder interests at the fore.

“We need to demonstrate to our stakeholders and First Nations that we are listening, and that what we hear from them will be considered. We try to involve stakeholders and First Nations in the process design and as early as possible.”