



MaREI

Energy · Climate · Marine

Practice and Policy Brief

Recommendations for policy and practice on community engagement concerning energy and climate related infrastructure

Evan Boyle, Martin Galvin, Alexandra Revez, Aoife Deane, Brian Ó Gallachóir, Gerard Mullally

HOST INSTITUTION



PARTNER INSTITUTIONS



Five Key Policy Recommendations

- Community engagement must be supported to become a core aspect of planning and development at a cross-institutional level concerning energy and climate infrastructure.
- Communities should be facilitated to build capacity towards initiating collaborative projects with public bodies as they relate to the delivery of climate related infrastructure, moving toward community empowerment.
- Regulatory processes should be leveraged to develop a culture of co-production across public bodies, so that the voice of citizens and communities, their knowledge, and their participation is prioritised within a more expansive definition of community engagement.
- Training for professional development with relation to community engagement should be prioritised alongside third-level pathways which are currently under-development.
- There is a need for a unified narrative on national infrastructural developments in relation to national law, decarbonisation, and transformative change in Irish society.

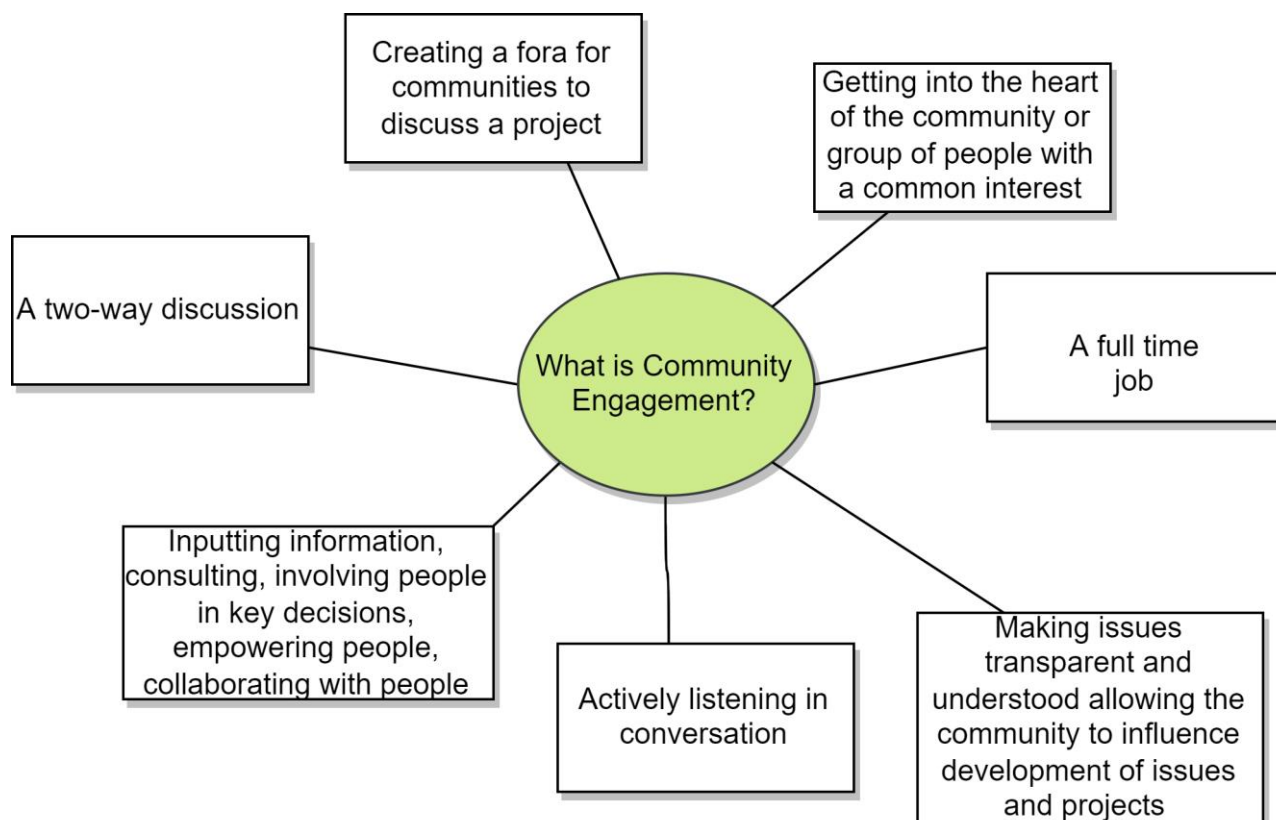
Community engagement concerning energy and climate related infrastructure

This document presents practice guidelines and policy recommendations emanating from a co-produced research intervention between MaREI and several public bodies in Ireland.

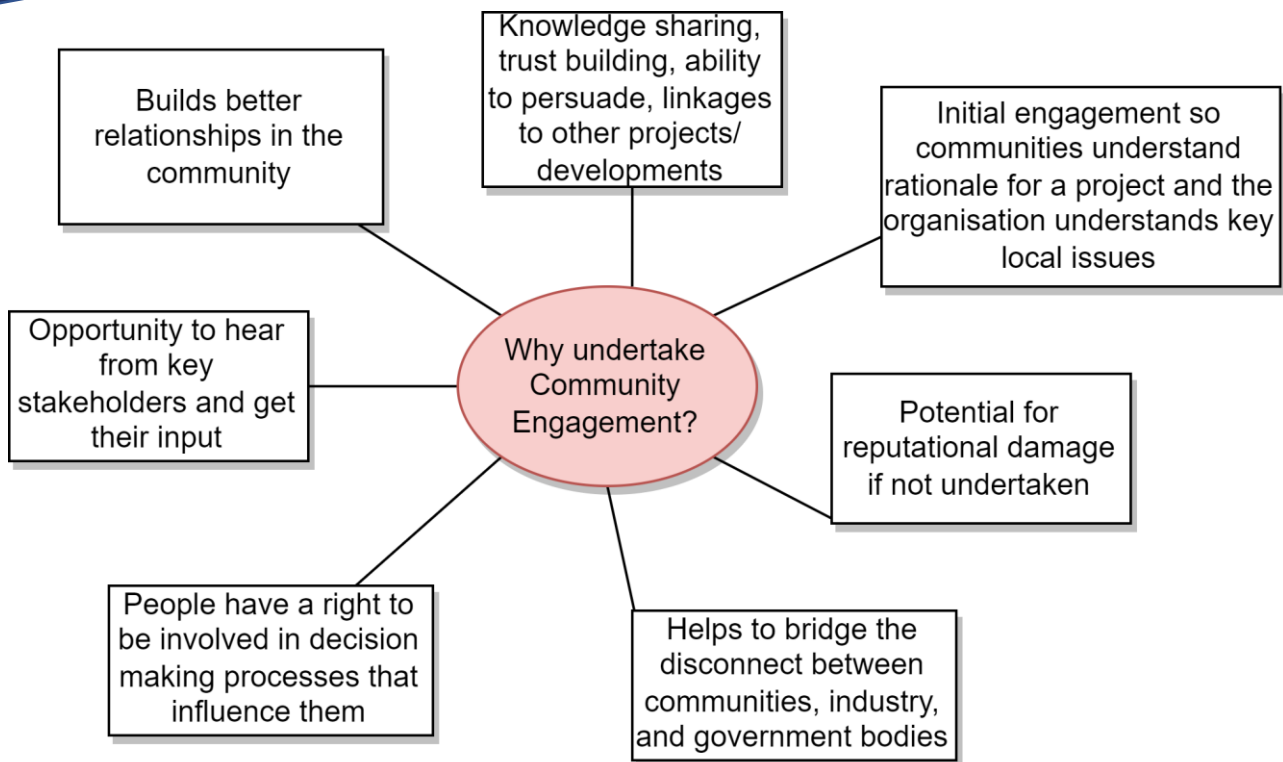
Context for Engagement

Ireland must undergo the development and delivery of a wide range of climate related infrastructure updates and expansions if it is to meet emissions reduction targets. A change is needed with relation to the way in which institutions interact with community groups and citizens to effectively go about implementing the necessary measures to expedite the transition to a low-carbon energy system. At the international level, Future Earth, an international body established by the UN to coordinate global sustainability research, identified co-production as a core design principle of climate action. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) support the emergence of new structures for engagement between top-down and bottom-up actors. SDG 9 focuses on promoting inclusive and sustainable infrastructure development, SDG 16 calls for strong institutions, SDG 7 seeks affordable and clean energy, and SDG 17 frames partnerships for achieving the goals. The SDGs offer a landscape setting from which policy can be developed. The 2020 OECD report stressed the importance of co-production in transdisciplinary approaches to sustainable development, climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals. In a European

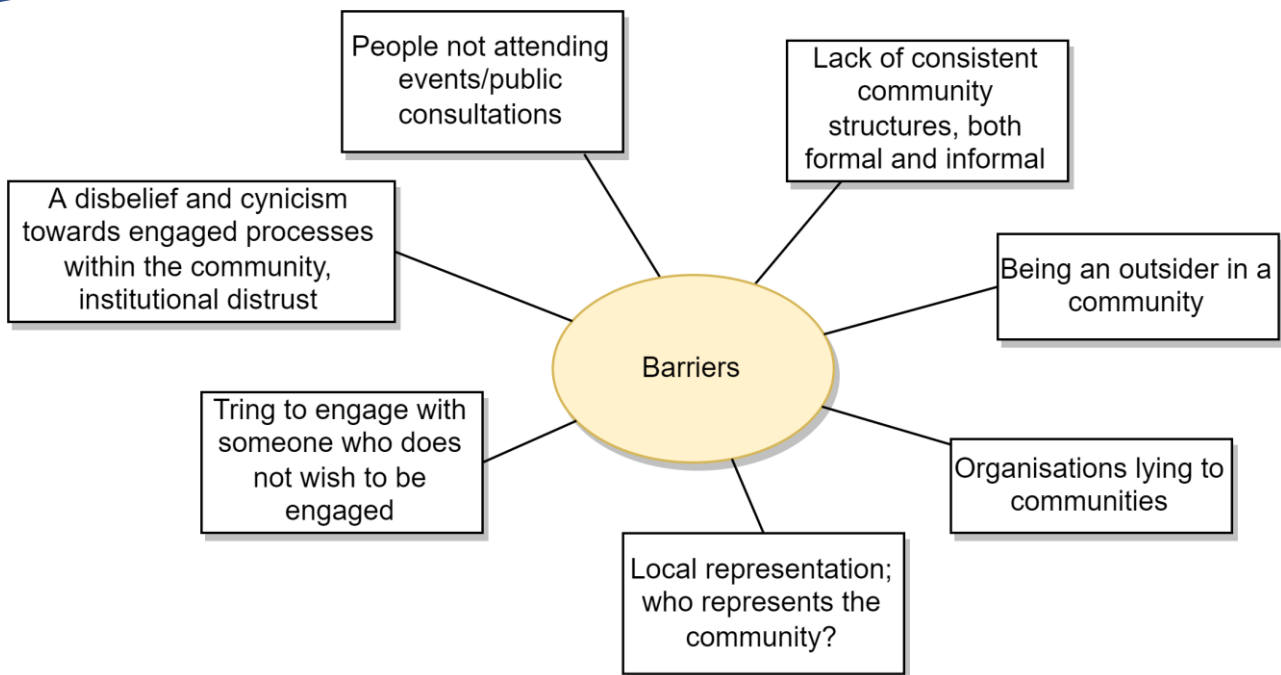
context, the Renewable Energy Directive (2018) outlines the need for citizens to participate in the energy transition. It outlines the importance of considering policies relating to the participation of those affected by projects, with the participation of citizens and communities seen as an important mechanism to deliver the energy transition needed to meet emission reduction targets.



In Ireland, the Climate Action Plan outlines the need to enhance the effectiveness of network building and deliberative capacity for climate action. It seeks to provide supports to communities' low carbon developments. The Programme for Government (2020) outlines a commitment to "bringing communities with us" reflecting intent to develop a new model of engagement with citizens, sectors, and regions. This includes conducting dialogue on a structured basis, especially regarding new climate related infrastructure, so that "diverse elements of society can input into the process and become involved in delivering actions within their own sphere of influence" (Programme for Government: Our Shared Future, 2020, P.39). Recent policy developments, both nationally and at a European level, support the need for a re-evaluation of community engagement within public bodies to transform their relationships with citizens/communities so that achieving the scale of changes needed to respond to the challenges posed by climate change can be delivered. This policy brief presents guidelines for practice and recommendations for policy based on research conducted with a group of community engagement practitioners within Irish public bodies, convened and facilitated by MaREI.

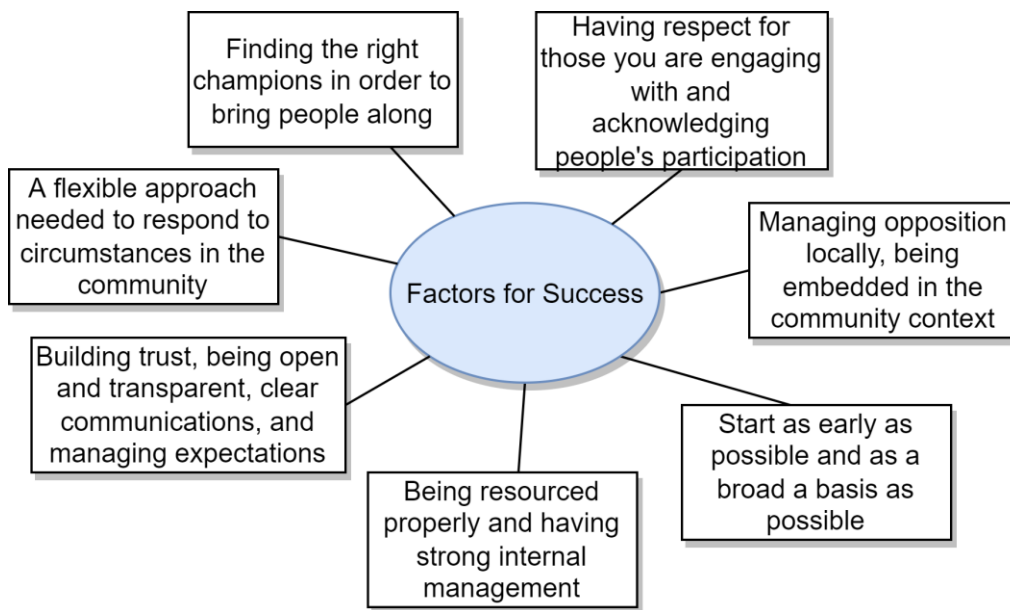


The public bodies which are included in this group consist of Ervia (operator of gas and water networks), Irish Water (national water utility), Coillte (national public forestry and land management organisation), ESBN (national operators of the electricity distribution system), CIE (Ireland's largest public transport provider), EirGrid (develop and operate national electricity transmission system), SEAI (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland), and a number of individuals employed within the Climate Action Regional Office's (CARO). The insights and recommendations presented here were established through a series of workshops and interviews (held January to March 2020) which aimed to: (a) build capacity - creating an environment where participants can share and learn from each other and (b) to develop a policy document on good practice for community engagement within public bodies in the Irish context.



Good Practice Guidelines for Community Engagement

- Build a profile of the community as a first step. Review other projects- map out the area and identify any groups previously engaged with. This is time intensive but essential.
- Engage with a wide range of local stakeholders, early in the project. Build early relationship with those with strong opinions.
- Parameters should be made clear from the outset. Transparency is a vital factor for successful engagement. Be clear about what's open for consultation and what's not.
- Pulse checks throughout the engagement process. Reasons for moving from one step to another throughout the consultative process must be justified and understood within the community
- Consultation reports showing where feedback has been used.
- Contingency and legacy planning must be implemented



Alongside these structured good practice guidelines for community engagement, there is also a need to allow for flexibility when interacting with different community contexts to facilitate the diverse forms which communities can take, and the diversity of individuals within those communities. A communication or social marketing approach to public engagement on issues related to climate action will not be sufficient for delivering the scale of projects needed to meet decarbonisation needs, and while good practice guidelines should provide a structure to engagement, communities must be treated as autonomous, distinct, and diverse. The range of infrastructural changes needed in the years ahead presents an opportunity to support communities to develop capacity to deliver transformative change across a wide range of sustainability measures, beyond individual sectors or technologies.

Contact Details

Evan Boyle
Evan.boyle@ucc.ie

Alexandra Revez
Alexandra.revez@ucc.ie

Aoife Deane
Aoife.deane@ucc.ie

Acknowledgements

This research was part-funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) through MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate, and Marine [Grant No: 12/RC/2302_P2], with supporting funding obtained from ESB Networks and EirGrid.

Further Reading

1. Boyle, E., Galvin, M., Revez, A., Deane, A., Gallachóir, B.Ó. and Mullally, G., 2022. Flexibility & structure: Community engagement on climate action & large infrastructure delivery. *Energy Policy*, 167, p.113050.
2. Gov.ie. 2020. Programme for Government: Our Shared Future. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>> [Accessed 6 July 2022].

