STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Reference number	6Pr_6.4
Accountable executive manager	Executive Director: Corporate Relations and Marketing
Framework Owner	Director: Corporate Communication
Responsible division	Corporate Relations and Marketing
Status	Approved
Approved by	Council
Date of approval	17 November 2022
Date of amendments	
Review date	17 November 2025

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Preamble

Against the background of the dream to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care, the Council of the North-West University (NWU) adopted the Stakeholder Relations Framework on 17 November 2022.

1   Definitions

1.1   Material issue relates to a matter that is likely to influence decisions, actions and behaviour of stakeholders and/or the university.

1.2   Material stakeholder refers to a stakeholder who can influence the outcome of a significant issue and the long-term success of the NWU.

1.3   Illegitimate stakeholder refers to a stakeholder who might not have a link with the university, and whose views the management might not consider when making decisions, especially if they are raising non- material issues.

2   Introduction and context

2.1   Introduction

The purpose of the NWU is *"To excel in innovative learning and teaching and cutting-edge research, thereby benefitting society through knowledge.*" In executing this purpose, the university acknowledges that it must engage with several stakeholders to mobilise for their support.

The compilation of the framework will mainly be informed by the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (SES) published in 2015 by AccountAbility. This organisation is a leading global research, consulting and standards organisation providing innovative solutions in the areas of corporate responsibility and sustainable development.

The purpose of the AA1000SES (2015) is to establish the benchmark for the assessment, planning and implementation of good and quality stakeholder engagement.

Material stakeholder refers to a stakeholder, individual or group of people, who has an interest in the NWU, and can influence the outcome of a significant issue, and the long-term success of the university. Examples of material stakeholder groups in this context will include the university Council, government, staff, students, alumni, donors, prospective students, employers of our students, business community, service providers, communities and many others that can affect or be affected by the university activities.

The NWU must adopt a stakeholder inclusive approach when planning and implementing its core business. This must be achieved by taking into account the reasonable needs, interests and expectations of NWU stakeholders, and at the same time, considering the sustainability of the university. Balancing the needs, interests and expectations of stakeholders and ensuring that the university is sustainable, is a dynamic and ongoing process. The NWU must establish and maintain strong relations with material stakeholders, and this will make it possible for the university to manage and strike this balance when dealing with issues.

2.2 Context

This framework shall be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with the:

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997
- Statute of the North-West University; and
- all related policies of the NWU, particularly the brand and communication policies.

3 Scope of application and objectives

The provisions contained in this framework are applicable to NWU Council members, employees, students and third parties who may be appointed by the NWU to implement its programmes and activities.

The objective of the framework is to describe fundamental stakeholder relations management principles applicable to the NWU to:

3.1 Establish and maintain sound and mutually beneficial relationships with material stakeholders

3.2 Continuously improve communication and engagements to manage reasonable needs, and expectations of stakeholders; and

3.3 Provide targeted and timely information in a proactive manner to the different stakeholders.

4 Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The Executive Director: Corporate Relations and Marketing has the responsibility to oversee the overall implementation of this framework; and

4.2 The University Management Committee (UMC) oversees the integration of the Stakeholder Engagement Framework into the University's strategic agenda, and all relevant business processes to ensure the sustainability of the NWU.

5 Accountability and integration

The NWU recognises that different stakeholders add value and play an important role in helping the university to achieve its strategic objectives. In addition, the NWU places a high priority on transparent, clear, proactive, and meaningful dialogue with all its stakeholders.

5.1 Commitment to AA1000 Accountability Principles (AA1000APS)

To implement quality stakeholder engagement based on international best practice, the AA1000SES (2015) requires that the university must commit to the AccountAbility Principles Standard (AA1000APS, 2008) which are - inclusivity, materiality, and responsiveness. These three principles must be adopted and applied consistently to the governance system of the university.

5.1.1 Inclusivity

The university must engage with material stakeholders at different levels including at the governance level.

5.1.2 Materiality

The University decision makers must identify and be clear on issues that are important to the NWU.

5.1.3 Responsiveness

The university must act transparently and timely on material issues. These issues can include decisions taken, actions and performance of the university. Material issues might be stakeholder specific and can compete for available resources, and as a result, responses must be prioritised and communicated accordingly.
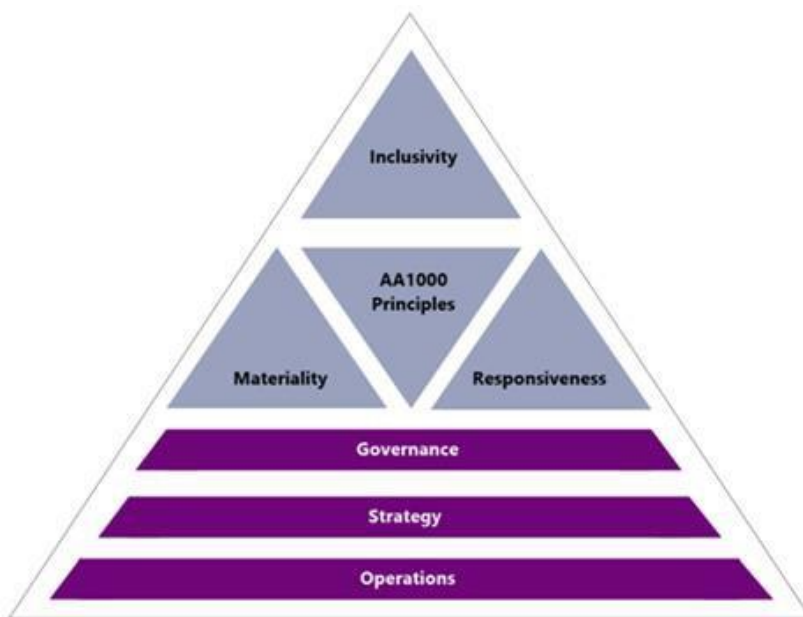
Figure 1: Integration of AA1000 Principles to Stakeholder Engagement

5.2 Integration into governance, strategy, and operations

Stakeholder engagement must be integrated in the core functions of the university, namely, corporate governance, strategy, and operations.

5.2.1 Integrate into university's corporate governance

Stakeholder engagement must be integrated into the governance system of the university. The university system must define the decision-making process, roles, and responsibilities of different structures of the NWU. The university governance and processes for decision making require formal frameworks for identifying material issues and for collecting relevant information to form an opinion, make a decision and implement the same.

5.2.2 Integrate into university's strategy

The policies and processes of the university must include the requirement to use stakeholder engagement when developing strategies and important documents including policies.

5.2.3 Integrate into university's operational management

Stakeholder engagement must be integrated into the operations of the university. Strong and well managed stakeholder relations build trust, support and insights gained from engagements will contribute to the sustainability of the university.

6 Purpose, scope, and stakeholders

Planning stakeholder engagement must firstly start with establishing the purpose for engagement, the scope and stakeholders who must be involved.

6.1 Purpose of engagement

The process owner must first establish the purpose of the engagement, that is, the need, issue or risk that must be addressed. The process owner or engagement owner refers to any official of the university or delegated person who is tasked to plan and/or implement a stakeholder engagement meeting.

6.2 Establish the scope of stakeholder engagement based on the purpose

Establishing the scope of stakeholder engagement must take the following into account:

- The material issue that the engagement must address and link to the purpose. The material issue relates to an issue that is likely to influence decisions, actions, and behaviour of stakeholders and/or the university

- The university faculty or division and associated activities that the engagement will address; and

- Establish if the stakeholder engagement will look at long-term strategic issues, current concerns or both areas.

6.3 Determining engagement owners and identification of stakeholders.

Engagement initiatives must have an owner who will oversee the planning, implementation and review of engagement programmes, including the identification of stakeholders who must be involved and engaged.

6.3.1 Determining engagement owners

For accountability purposes, an engagement initiative must have an owner(s) to determine the purpose, scope and identify the stakeholder to be involved and engaged, and oversee the implementation of the engagement.

6.3.2 Stakeholder identification

Stakeholders who will be affected or can affect the decision or activity of the university, must be identified and, considering the engagement purpose, scope and material issues identified. The material issue identified might require the university to engage with several stakeholders with diverse and conflicting interests and concerns. In that case, it is helpful to follow a systematic method to identifying stakeholders considering the scope of the engagement and guided by stakeholder attributes such as the following:

- Dependency – stakeholder groups directly or indirectly dependent on the university's core activities such as teaching and learning, research, and community engagement

- Responsibility – stakeholder groups that the university has a legal, ethical, or operational responsibility to attend to, now or in the future. This may be prospective students who have applied to the university.

- Tension – stakeholder groups or individuals that the university must attend to immediately because of different reasons that can include operational, financial, socio-economic, or environmental issues

- Influence – stakeholder groups or individuals who can have an influence and impact on various areas of the university including strategic or operational issues.

- Diverse perspectives – stakeholder groups or individuals who might present different views that can add value and lead to a new understanding of issues and identification of possible and innovative solutions.

The university must also be aware and respond accordingly to illegitimate stakeholders who may claim to represent a stakeholder group and who nonetheless can affect the activities of the university.
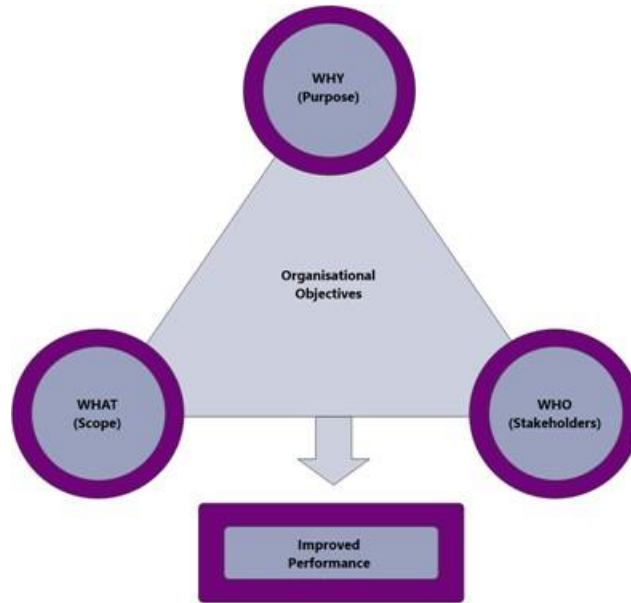
Figure 2: Purpose, scope, and stakeholders to be engaged.

7 Stakeholder engagement process

The stakeholder engagement process must include four stages:

- Plan
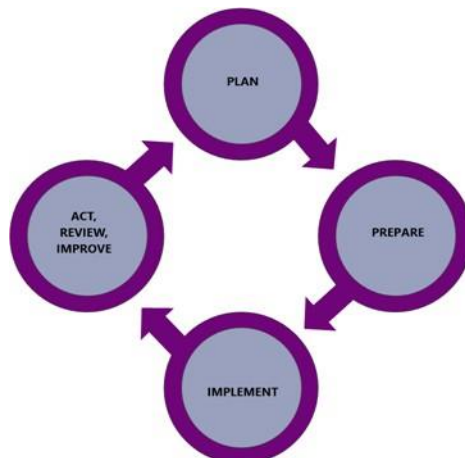- Prepare
- Implement, and
- Act, Review and Improve

Figure 3: Stakeholder engagement process

7.1 Plan

7.1.1 Profile and mapping of stakeholders

The process owner must profile and map the stakeholders, at an individual and organisation level. The aim must be to better understand the stakeholder(s) including the following elements – which stakeholder should be prioritised and how and why should they be engaged or why will they want to engage with the university. All of this must be done considering the engagement purpose and scope. The engagement owner must map stakeholders in different ways including determining their level of influence and interest on the university business and knowledge of material issues.

7.1.2 Determining level and method of engagement

With the insights gained after profiling and mapping the stakeholder(s) and this will include understanding the needs, expectations, and capacity to engage, the engagement owner must determine the best level(s) and method(s) of engagement. The level(s) and method(s) of engagement must be suitable to the purpose and scope of the engagement and may differ at different stages of the engagement process. The six levels of engagement pyramid are:

Figure 4: Six levels of engagement pyramid

7.1.3 Establish and communicate boundaries of disclosure

The engagement owner must establish and communicate the boundaries of disclosure on the information that will be shared with the stakeholder(s) and what information the stakeholder(s) will be allowed to communicate outside the engagement process.

7.1.4 Draft engagement plan

The engagement owner must develop an engagement plan that covers the following elements - purpose and scope, owners of the engagement process, clarify roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, identify stakeholders, profiling and mapping of stakeholders, engagement level(s) and methods and boundaries of disclosure. The engagement owner must also identify and mitigate factors that might negatively affect the ability of stakeholders to engage effectively.

7.1.5 Establish indicators of quality stakeholder engagement

Engagement owners must monitor and measure stakeholder engagement to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved and most importantly, to identify areas that require improvement. The engagement owner must establish key performance indicators (KPI) that will be used to measure the engagement.

7.1.6 Stakeholder Engagement Matrix

The following is an example of a stakeholder engagement matrix that includes power and interest assessment. C stands for current and D for desired. The matrix is a helpful tool to assess the actual, and desired engagement levels of stakeholders, and gaps that might exist and should be closed.

Stakeholder name or group	Power/Interest	Observing	Following	Endorsing	Contributing	Owning	Leading
Stakeholder 1	High/low	C			D		
Stakeholder 2	High/medium			C		D	

Figure 4: Example of Stakeholder Engagement Matrix including Power and Interest Assessment

7.2 PREPARE

7.2.1 Mobilise resources

The engagement owner must mobilise resources to ensure the engagement process is inclusive and does not alienate any stakeholder.

7.2.2 Identify and prepare for engagement risks

The engagement owner must:

- Identify, assess, and address engagement risks.
- Anticipate possible negative outcomes and develop mitigating strategies.
- Identify areas for opportunity and positive relationship building.

7.3 IMPLEMENT THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

7.3.1 Invite stakeholders to engage

The engagement owner must compile a database and invite stakeholders identified on time and using appropriate communication channels.

7.3.2 Brief stakeholders

Were applicable, the owner of the engagement must develop and distribute the meeting material to enable stakeholders to prepare in advance and adequately for the engagement.

7.3.3 Engage

At the start of the engagement, the engagement owner, with inputs from stakeholders, shall establish the rules of engagement, and make sure the engagement takes place in a professional, fair, transparent, and respectful manner.

7.3.4 Document the engagement and its outputs

The engagement owner must document the discussion including the following:

- Purpose and aims of the engagement
- Method(s) used
- Stakeholders who were present and absent
- Time frame
- Summary of issues raised

- Summary of key discussions and proposed interventions; and

- Summary of the engagement outputs, that is, decisions and actions agreed upon.

7.3.5 Develop an action plan

The engagement owner must develop an action plan that responds to all outputs as agreed upon by the stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities must be defined with realistic time frames.

7.3.6 Communicate engagement outputs and action plan

The engagement owner must communicate the engagement outputs and action plan to the relevant stakeholders using suitable communication channels. The channels that can be used, include written reports, telephone calls, emails, stakeholder events, follow-up one on one or group meetings and, where appropriate, the same can be communicated widely to the internal and general external public.

7.4 REVIEW AND IMPROVE

The engagement owner must monitor the stakeholder engagement process focusing on different areas.

7.4.1 Monitor and evaluate the engagement

Monitoring and evaluating must be conducted with the aim to improve current and future management of stakeholder engagement initiatives and eventually to help improve performance and achieve results for the university.

Monitoring and evaluation process must focus on the following areas:

- Commitment to the AA1000APS Principles (inclusivity, materiality, and responsiveness) and integration of stakeholder engagement in the university's governance, strategy, and operations

- Purpose, scope, and stakeholder engagement

- Engagement process (planning, preparing, engaging, acting, reviewing, and improving)

- Engagement outputs and outcomes; and

- Reporting

7.4.2 Learn and improve

The engagement owners with inputs from stakeholders, must use feedback to continuously improve the stakeholder engagement process.

7.4.3 Develop and follow-up on an action plan

Different and individual stakeholder engagement action plans must lead to the development of the overall university stakeholder engagement action plan and the same must be aligned with the university strategy and objectives. Engagement owners must monitor and implement individual engagement action plans to support the objectives of the university.

7.4.4 Report on engagement

In addition to engaging with stakeholders involved in the engagement process, the university must communicate to the public the stakeholder engagement overall outcomes, impact, and should demonstrate the value of stakeholder engagement to the university's strategy and operations. Stakeholder engagement reporting must be integrated to the university's reporting tools, including annual and financial reports, and can cover the following:

- Stakeholder groups engaged

- Engagement methods used

- Frequency of engagement

- Key issues and concerns raised by stakeholders and the university response to issues raised.

8 References

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