



Skills for Sustainability



Manufacturing Skills Australia

Connecting with the community

What is this all about?

Traditionally businesses maintain a strong focus on factors that have a clear and direct effect on their economic performance, predominantly looking at financial measures such as costs, sales and profit margins.

Many enterprises are moving towards sustainability by taking a broader view of their performance including their relationship to the environment and the community. This is not just for the ‘feel good’ factor. It enables them to fully assess the potential and actual impact to their business – both costs and benefits – from their interactions with the local and broader community and with the physical environment.

These concepts are embedded in terms like the triple bottom line, people-planet-profit and social, economic and environmental sustainability.

What’s it got to do with ‘community’?

Connecting with the community relates to the human and social aspects of sustainability and the concept of corporate social responsibility. It places the business within a community of people and recognises the impact that a business has on its employees and individuals in the local area and globally - both customers and non-customers.

Connecting with the community will be influenced by your approach to the social implications of your business activities and how you:

- incorporate sustainability principles into strategic planning
- provide leadership and model ethical practices
- manage your organisation’s culture
- comply with access and equity, cultural heritage and land management requirements
- recruit and develop your workforce
- select contractors and suppliers.

What can I do?

Your approach will depend on factors such as the size of your business, your existing relationship with the local community, your reputation, your immediate needs and long term goals.

Community relationships

If you want to build stronger relationships with the local community you might focus on sponsoring events held by local schools or community groups, targeting your recruitment in the local area or setting up programs to encourage your staff to participate in community or charity activities.

It is important to listen and respond to any concerns about your operations in the community. This is usually managed by establishing mechanisms for consultation and communications with community stakeholders. These provide the opportunity to understand the issues raised by the community, provide information about the feasibility of making adjustments and to explain to the community how you are responding to their needs.

Community infrastructure and cultural heritage

If you are planning to relocate or establish a new site for your business you might focus on how you manage the impact on the local community. The impact could be increased noise, traffic congestion, lack of housing, resettlement requirements or pressure on access to local services that arise from influx of personnel, site development work or operational processes that are new to the area.

Cultural heritage usually refers to buildings, precincts or objects that carry aesthetic and/or historic value by providing evidence of cultural practices or beliefs. Any site development or construction should consider the impact on culturally significant buildings and how to manage any artefacts that might be unearthed.

