Guidelines: How to prepare Community Impact Assessments

Anticipating and understanding impacts on people is a cornerstone of a successful Development Response approach.

Community Impact Assessments help you get to know a community. They capture needs, highlight issues and are an essential step in creating plans to mitigate and manage the potential effects of construction. They should be continually reviewed throughout a project.

In this guide:

- What is a Community Impact Assessment?

- What goes into a Community Impact Assessment?

- How to make it useful for your project teams and suppliers

- Common impacts to consider

- How to start preparing a Community Impact Assessment

Need help?

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A guide to preparing Community Impact Assessments

This guide is designed to help you gather information and assess the potential impacts of your project on the surrounding community.

What is a Community Impact Assessment?

A Community Impact Assessment is a tool for exploring and explaining the effects of project construction on a community.

These assessments help project teams build empathy through a deeper understanding of the place and people impacted by construction. They identify risks and opportunities, and potential issues that could result from project operations.

The better the quality of information, the easier it will be for project teams and contractors to develop effective construction disruption mitigation management plans (CDMMPs) that improve the customer experience of construction.

A CIA considers the physical, operational, cultural, and social characteristics of the people, properties, and businesses in and around the project area.

What should a Community Impact Assessment contain?

An assessment should describe the activities and uses within the space and adjoining it. This is usually by property address, building or space. It can describe:

- The operational requirements of these activities and their users
- Key concerns raised such as crime, security and safety
- Loading and servicing needs, fire and emergency access and egress
- Vehicle, public transport, servicing, pedestrian and cycle/scooter movements and patterns
- Corridors and network connections through or around the area
- Events, festivals and other significant periods where use of the area will change or intensify
- Cultural characteristics that could present opportunities or challenges
- Approved, planned or other public or private developments in the area that could interact
- What's happened in the past that could influence people's views on the project.

Making it useful

Impact assessments help project teams to have a common understanding and make informed decisions. They can also be an evolving record of the shape and wellbeing of the community.

The report must be useful to project teams, especially contractors, and should:

- Be structured so it is easily followed – mapped to street addresses
- Be visual – using aerial shots, maps, photos to give context
- Include insights based on key statistics, e.g. numbers of residents, hours of operation, or patterns of use
- Capture as many known or potential sensitivites and impacts as possible
- Be clear in identifying any assumptions or information gaps so further research can be undertaken.

Common impacts to consider when doing an Assessment

Impacts on Businesses:

- Reduced foot traffic due to road closures or detours
- Noise and Vibration
- Visual impacts
- Access and movement of vehicles and people into the business
- Outdoor dining impacts.
- Loss of income during construction phases
- Increased delivery delays or disruptions
- Negative customer perceptions
- Changes in employee commuting times or patterns
- Temporary relocation or adjustment of business hours
- Reduced visibility or signage obstruction
- Uncertainty affecting long-term planning and investment
- Utility outages

Impacts on Residents:

- Increased noise pollution, especially during early or late hours
- Air quality deterioration due to dust and emissions
- Vibration impacts on homes or nearby structures
- Disruption to daily routines (school drop-offs, commuting, etc.)
- Decreased property values (perceived or actual)
- Feelings of stress, frustration, or reduced wellbeing
- Limited access to public amenities
- Safety concerns due to construction traffic and machinery
- Night works
- Perceptions of safety, and increased antisocial behaviour
- Utility outages

Impacts on users and visitors:

- Confusion and navigating changing spaces as pedestrians
- Perceptions of safety affect route choices
- Avoidance of areas due to works disruption
- Changes to parking spaces or driving routes
- Uncertainty about what businesses or services are open or accessible
- Noise and visual impacts affecting wellbeing
- Temporary loss of areas of refuge or peace, places to rest.

Prompts for a Community Impact Assessment

A Community Impact Assessment should be informed by repeat visits to the site, observations and conversations with locals and other users of the area those. It is important to talk to others who are working in the area and those who have knowledge, or may have already consulted stakeholders.Be empathetic. Look at the area from the perspectives of different users.

Think about the area around the site

- Identify the project area on a map
- Show the blocks that are most impacted e.g. one city centre block beyond the project area, plus access routes or noise spill areas
- Consider the wider area context:
  - Why do people come here? What do they do when they're here?
  - Commuting trends
  - Pedestrian, vehicle, and bike movement through each street (include day and night and peak times if possible, seasonality)
  - Proximity to public spaces and venues (e.g. public squares, parks)
  - Any regular or major events/ activities/markets in the area
  - Recent or planned developments in the area, private or public

Talk to people who live, work or gather nearby

- Review any engagement work to look for leads and needs.
- Engage directly with people, including residents, businesses, property owners, community groups, service providers
- Capture:
  - Concerns raised about the place, and the project
  - Opportunities that come up in coversation
  - Insights to help better understand community needs and potential impacts
  - The state of mind of the community and its people.
  - The resilience or appetite of the community for change.
- Consider additional demographic information e.g.student population (including exam periods), ethnicity and language requirements for communication

Map out each of the impacted buildings and who uses them.

- Building management companies or building owners and/or body corporate (if applicable)
- Businesses operating from the building, including:
  - Business names
  - Type of business
  - Any specific operational needs
- Residential information:
  - Number of units and residents
  - Type of residential use and their occupiers (e.g. serviced apartments, long or short-term rentals, student housing, families)
  - Apartment quality indicators
- Capture uncertainties or things that could change:
  - Vacant stores/floors/space
  - Plans or timeframes for building development, renovations, or upgrades
  - Existing issues or future plans that may pose risks.

Understand how businesses operate and what they need

- Note any businesses that:
  - Rely on walk-in customer access
  - Use courier or delivery services (e.g. Uber Eats)
  - Have specific loading and servicing needs (e.g. large or frequent deliveries)
  - Operate using public space (e.g. outdoor dining, street trading)
  - Offer accommodation services e.g. hotels, hostets etc
- Consider sensitivities to:
  - Noise or vibration
  - Daytime or night-time works
  - Blocked footpaths or sightlines
  - Reduced foot traffic

Don't forget residents

- Look closely to find out if people live in the area; short and/or long-term
- Consider noise and vibration sensitivites, and appropriate timing of works to avoid sleep disruption
- Consider how they use space around the site recreationally or for amenity
- Be aware of compounding impacts from other projects

Public amenities and key utilities

- Ensure they remain serviceable, accessible, and easy to find:
  - Public toilets
  - Rubbish bins
  - Water fountains
  - Bike parking
  - Substations

Check how people and vehicles get in and out

- Identify access needs of each building, including:
  - Carpark and vehicle access
  - Pedestrian access (essential and non-essential)
  - Emergency exits
  - Any additional access requirements
- Estimate foot traffic into each building, including peak hours
- Loading and servicing requirements, frequency, type of activity

Review local history

- Past council engagement in the area (e.g. controversies or frustrations)
- Talks with businesses or residents about past or ongoing issues.

Consider community safety

- CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) and crime statistics
- Potential focal points for antisocial behaviour or community need
- Ongoing place management concerns (e.g. rubbish, anti-social behaviour)

Look for wins, alternatives, and ways to engage and collaborate during the project.

- Conversations and observations may reveal:
  - Alternative access options during construction
  - Trade-offs and compromises from the community to help you get things done more quickly
  - Possible activation, engagement or community development opportunities