# Pre-Conference Workshop on Stakeholder Engagement: Building relationships to reduce conflict

## Workshop Description:

Conflict over siting oil and gas wells, utility-scale solar, and wind turbines and associated infrastructure is increasing in some areas and these industries are experiencing increased opposition. Simultaneously, the balance of regulatory authority between state and local governments is shifting across many states. The shifting regulatory balance and the increased siting conflict is leading to deeper entrenchment of opposing views between industry, mineral rights owners, landowners, affected members of the public, and state and local governments. Many industry operators and companies are investing in building better relationships with external stakeholders, but many of these best practices are not widely used and may not result in a reduction in conflict. Effective engagement with a diverse set of external stakeholders has the potential to reduce conflict, improve the community perception of the industry, and strengthen the social license to operate, which could reduce delays and improve nuisance impacts. Effective stakeholder engagement, however, is often not a priority for industry, requires different skills than government relations or more traditional public relations. This workshop will present the basic components of effective stakeholder engagement and, in an interactive format, encourage workshop participants to discuss failures and successes to understand what really works and what doesn’t.

## Session One: Understanding Effective Stakeholder Engagement

What do we mean by stakeholder engagement and social license to operate? Why don’t we have a common understanding of stakeholder engagement and how it is different than agency rulemaking or industry-led engagement? Engagement between state and local governments, affected community members, and the regulated energy industry is a key component to responsible energy development. Creating effective stakeholder engagement across diverse views and authorities, however, is often hampered by a lack of a common understanding of essential engagement principles. This session will provide a framework for approaching stakeholder engagement that includes the essential principles of relationship building and effective stakeholder processes, including trust building, mutual learning, and expectation management.

## Session Two: Developing a Stakeholder Engagement Process

A well-designed stakeholder engagement process can reduce conflict and build relationships. This session will explore the following questions to help participants tailor stakeholder engagement processes for local context and for sustainable relationships over the long-term:

* How to build an inclusive process?
* How to build trust across divergent views and interests and desired outcomes?
* What is trust and how to build it in highly contentious settings?
* What is authentic dialogue?

## Session Three: Conflict Myth Busting

The energy industry has consistently experienced some level of conflict, which, over time, has led to entrenched conflict-management approaches. Many of these approaches undermine public acceptance or approval and create further division between all stakeholders interested in or affected by energy development. This session explores the most common myths about stakeholder engagement and provides participants with alternative approaches.

* **Myth #1** If everyone just had accurate information, the conflict would be reduced. Or more information conveyed earlier reduces conflict. (Reality: Information alone is insufficient to change attitudes.)
* **Myth #2** Success is equivalent to zero controversy. (Reality: All sides have legitimate concerns. Success is a fair process where all external stakeholders feel heard, even if they don’t agree with the outcome.)
* **Myth #3** It’s just one permit. (Reality: A permit-by-permit approach or site-by-site approach increases the likelihood for conflict, if the pace and scale is new to the area or as community values change.)