

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS FOR THE BLOCK ISLAND WIND FARM

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Involving the public in the planning process of large scale renewable energy systems, such as offshore wind, is not only helpful, but a necessity to ensuring project progress and development. This involvement can take various forms ranging from information hearings to allowing for public decision making regarding the project and its impacts. Since opportunities that are given to the public for engagement are left up to developers and management agencies handling the project, literature focusing on public engagement for renewable energy has focused on advocating for what type or combination of methods lead to successful projects. However, the literature provides few insights into what public stakeholders expect from such a process. Without fully understanding stakeholder expectations, public engagement may fail to generate public acceptance. This study seeks to fill this information gap using the Block Island Wind Farm (BIWF) as a case study. As the first offshore wind energy project to begin construction in the United States, the BIWF provides a unique opportunity to understand relationships among those interested in this type of project. Through qualitative interviews with three groups; managers (government and nongovernment agencies), project developers, and public stakeholders this study highlights key differences that may exist among the three groups' beliefs about the public engagement process. An analysis of these interviews reveals how the public's beliefs, values and attitudes about public engagement were and were not included into the process. Equipping agencies and developers with this type of information will better prepare them from the start in engaging the public for renewable energy projects, such as offshore wind. As well as, provide a more just and fair public process as these technologies look to increase their footprint in the coming years.