TOOL 4

Ensuring engagement is consistent with Indigenous Peoples' decision-making processes

This tool outlines some of the differences between company and traditional decision-making structures and processes, and provides practical steps mining company staff can take to ensure the company's engagement activities are consistent with Indigenous Peoples' decision-making processes.

Differences between company and traditional decision-making structures and processes

In many places around the world, Indigenous Peoples have retained at least some aspects of their traditional decision-making structures and processes.

A number of international standards and best practices recommend that companies seek to recognize, understand and work through traditional decision-making structures as early as possible when engaging with indigenous communities (see Box 4).

Box 4
Traditional decision-making structures

Decisions in indigenous communities are often reached through a consensus-based approach of participatory group consultation, negotiation and mediation. Often elders and other traditional community leaders play a key role in these decision-making processes. Further, traditional decision-making processes often take time so indigenous groups can fully consider the consequences of issues and can revisit particular issues multiple times if required. Often, it may be considered culturally inappropriate or disrespectful to talk about business without following cultural protocols and "affirming the relationship". On the other hand, mining companies often operate under strict time constraints to achieve objectives under project milestones, and decisions are often reached based on time and cost efficiency.

To ensure that Indigenous Peoples have meaningful involvement in project decision-making processes and the achieved outcomes are representative of Indigenous Peoples, it is essential that companies understand these differences in decision-making structures and seek to work through traditional decision-making processes where possible.