EIA AND RENEWABLE ENERGY:

Dialogue Toolkit

VVMplus

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

An early and constructive dialogue with the local community is increasingly seen as essential in renewable energy planning in Denmark. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) include public hearings required by law and typically form the framework for most of the dialogue between the local communities and the developers, planners, and politicians.

While there is plenty of guidance on community dialogue available, there is a need to translate this into the specific context of EIAs for renewable energy projects. The challenge of fostering good dialogue is considerable, partly because a diverse range of actors are involved, and several parties are involved in the dialogue at various points of the process. This toolkit takes a point of departure in a process where the municipality is the responsible authority, but many of the recommendations are relevant also in projects, where different state authorities are responsible for the process and project approval.

This is a draft community dialogue toolkit designed to match the EIA process. The purpose is to provide the basis for ensuring consistent use of best-practice dialogue approaches[1] throughout the EIA, ensuring proper dialogue with local communities affected by renewable energy projects and fostering a good process for all involved actors.

Part 1 briefly describes the background and purpose of this document. Parts 2 and 3 outline and analyze the typical set-up in terms of dialogue partners and the EIA process, respectively.

Part 4 includes tools and guidance for underpinning and facilitating constructive dialogue throughout the EIA process. The approach is to look at the entire EIA process from the community's perspective, recognizing that:

a) The local community is an important planning and discussion partner and should to be taken seriously throughout the planning process. The involvement of the community is central in 1. Improving the quality and value of the planning outcome and 2. creating trust and legitimacy that may enable local people to accept the project.

b) The quality of the dialogue itself is important to people, and can impact how the community views the energy project.

c) The community's overall experience may be impacted throughout the process. There are legal minimum requirements for public information and involvement at certain critical points of the EIA process, however the citizens' perception of dialogue quality will be shaped by a blend of what happens at these points and what happens at other points.

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[1] Best-practice approaches for community dialogue are drawn from a variety of sources. See Annex 2 for a list of references.

2 KEY DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS

The EIA dialogue involves several groups on the planning side and in the community (see figure 1). Each type of participant brings in their own competencies, perceptions, and interests.

Figure 1: The main participants in the EIA dialogue

Below, the typical role and key interests of each of these actors are summarized.

AUTHORITIES

1) *The municipality administration* plays a key role in the planning process, ensuring compliance with regulations that apply to renewable energy planning and construction.
   Typical key interests:
   - Wishes to maintain trust and good relations with the citizens.
   - Wishes to inform about the project and answer the citizens' questions.
   - Needs to contribute towards national climate goals, as per national policy.
   - Wishes to generate economic development in the local area.
   - Needs to focus on compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
   - The administrative framework supports the goals set by the municipality's politicians, and implements politically determined strategies.
   - Seeks positive publicity and wants to avoid negative publicity.

2) *The municipality politician* sets out goals and strategies that the administration needs to follow and implement. They also oversee the administration's work and will endorse or reject the administration's recommendations regarding any major construction project.
   Typical key interests:
   - Wishes to maintain trust and good standing among the citizens.
   - Wants to demonstrate they care about the local community. Depending on their political stance, the politician may emphasize various aspects – e.g. job creation, economic development, environmental issues, or people's health and wellbeing.
   - Wishes to demonstrate vigor and determination in fostering a better society (as per their own political view).

- Seeks positive publicity and wants to avoid negative publicity.

DEVELOPERS

3) *The consultant* is normally a consultancy company hired by the developer to conduct the EIA and the related technical analyses.
Typical key interests:
- Needs a clear description of the assignment.
- Needs cooperation from the municipality.
- Needs easy access to relevant available information and data.
- Possesses technical expertise and is keen to maintain a high professional standard.
- Seeks positive publicity and wants to avoid negative publicity.

4) *The developer* is investing in the project and is the primary driving force behind the project. Typical key interests:
- Desires a smooth and fast approval process.
- Is concerned about local opposition that can cause significant delays or put their project on hold.
- Interested in cost-efficiency and cost management. May be wary of changes to the original project that are potentially costly.
- Is focused on the positive impacts of the project, e.g. providing local employment and driving the green energy transition.
- Seeks positive publicity and wants to avoid negative publicity.

LOCAL COMMUNITY

5) *Individual local citizens* may be concerned about the impact of the energy project on the local area in general, including attractiveness of the neighborhood, traffic dangers, nuisance such as noise or visual inconvenience, house pricing levels, etc. Immediate neighbors of the energy project are a special sub-group with a greatly increased level of interest. The interest of citizens is rooted in their experience gained from leading their daily lives in the area.

6) *Local enterprises and business associations* are naturally concerned with how the energy project is going to affect the local business life and conditions.

7) *Citizen's associations* represent a diverse range of stakeholder interests and may include housing associations as well as groups concerned with culture, sports, recreation, nature conservation, etc. Each group will be concerned about how the energy project will influence their area of interest, and keen to secure positive impacts that will keep the local communities alive or maintain and enhance their quality of life.

Community stakeholders will typically seek to influence the process and related decisions e.g. about the location of the energy facility, compensation measures, etc.

3 THE EIA PROCESS

Below is an overview of the EIA process broken down into 12 key stages. Dialogue may happen (formally or informally) at each stage. The entire process normally takes one-two years.

Figure 2: Overview of the EIA process

Table 1 below provides a more detailed description and analysis of each of these stages, with a special view to specific challenges and opportunities for constructive dialogue.

Note: The table describes a stylized, linear process. In practice, the process may be more complex, with feedback loops and iterations occurring between some of the steps. Depending on the individual EIA process, iterations may in turn lead to additional rounds of dialogue.

TABLE 1: Stages of the EIA process & potential impact on community dialogue

Phase	Key activities	Dialogue - risks	Dialogue - opportunities
1 Preparation and notification	The developer makes preparations, including initial surveys of potential areas and possibly negotiations with landowners. Initial dialogue with the municipality may happen at this stage, however this is not always the case.	*People may learn about the project and start to be concerned about impacts. *People may hear rumors and suspect that plans are kept secret from them. *Tensions may start to build in the local community at this stage, especially if secret negotiations are involved.	*The developers communicate their intentions as early as possible. *The developers are present in the local area, make contact, show sincere interest in people's concerns and consult the locals about possible solutions. *The developers informally ask the local people for advice and inputs *The municipality is open and responsive towards inquiries.
2 EIA screening	The developer submits the project for screening by the municipality, to determine if an EIA is mandatory. The screening decision is publicly announced (may be merged with step 3)	As in stage 1.	As in stage 1.
3 Political-administrative process	The politicians review the material received and decide if a planning process will be initiated	As in stage 1.	As in stage 1.
4 Idea phase *Duration: Minimum 14 days*	The municipality will publicly announce the intended project and the EIA process, and will call for ideas and inputs.	*People may suspect that they won't have a real say. *If the call for inputs is hard to discover, they may feel left out on purpose. *If the process has come too far at this stage, this may in practice preclude the adoption of new ideas; this will naturally impact the citizens' perception and they may feel it is just a show process. *If the EIA has already started at this stage, people may feel that the idea phase is just a show and not a real opportunity to have influence.	*The call for inputs is effective and visible to people. *The call uses straightforward language. *The material presents the alternative options in an unbiased way and allows for opportunity to suggest relevant alternatives. *The call provides clarity on how and when citizens will be involved. *The EIA only begins after the idea phase is completed. * Citizens are proactively informed about the possibilities, rules, and procedures for submitting formal complaints throughout the EIA process.
5 Scoping	The scope of the EIA is explored & agreed between the developer/consultant and the municipality, and the municipality prepares a scoping statement.	*People remain unclear on how their inputs are being taken on board. Due to a lack of dialogue and contact, they may suspect their feedback isn't being considered.	* The consultant engages with the community to learn about local aspects of importance to the local community (perhaps as a follow-up on the ideas phase). *It is communicated how local inputs and the local community's baseline are used in determining the scope of the EIA. *Citizens experience timely response to their inquiries.
6 Political/ administrative process	The received inputs are processed by the municipality's administration; this work	*If a white paper is not produced and made public, people may feel more insecure about the process and suspect their inputs are being ignored.	*A well-structured white paper demonstrates transparency and openness to dialogue.

Phase	Key activities	Dialogue - risks	Dialogue - opportunities
(white paper not mandatory)	is reviewed and endorsed at the political level. The municipality may produce a white paper including a summary of the received inputs and the municipality's remarks.	*A white paper is produced, but does not provide sufficient overview and transparency, which can cause frustration.	*The white paper is published online and the local community is made aware of it. *The white paper is presented for discussion at a local meeting. *The municipality publishes a summary of discussions and outcomes, and explains the next steps. This is also communicated through the local press and other channels.
7 EIA development	The consultant conducts the EIA.	*People may become frustrated if: - they are unable to gain access to related documents - they are unclear on how their inputs have been taken on board. - they experience a 'closed door' when trying to engage with the developer, consultant, and/or the municipality. - their special knowledge is not used.	*Citizens experience that the municipality, developer and consultant are open to dialogue throughout the EIA development period. *The local community is offered financial support to bring in their own experts (this would be a new approach in a Danish context but it is known from abroad).
8 Draft EIA report	The consultant delivers the draft Environmental Impact Assessment report.	*People find the EIA report hard to navigate and read, or worse, they also find the non-technical summary hard to understand. This can lead to a feeling of exclusion. *Communication overload: Too complex and too comprehensive information can make people give up trying to understand what's in the report and what it means for them. *The report doesn't include social impacts that matter to the locals, or treats such issues superficially. * If the EIA only covers a project partially, citizens may perceive this as a 'salami method'.	The report: *is user-friendly, i.e. easy to read and navigate. *includes a well-written non-technical summary that outlines key points of importance for the local community, along with visuals providing extra clarity. * clarifies which mitigation measures are put in place. *comes across as well-balanced in its assessment of social and environmental impacts, respectively. *includes a social baseline description that the local community can recognize. *if applicable, proactively explains the reasons why the EIA only covers a project partially *addresses all issues of major concern to locals, at an appropriate level of depth.
9 Political/ administrative process followed by a public hearing (based on the EIA report, local plan proposal & municipal plan addendum)	The municipality will review the EIA report and may require amendments. Subsequently it is passed to the politicians for endorsement. The politicians may also request changes. Once the report is approved by the	*People are not made properly aware of public meetings. *A public meeting is held presenting the EIA report, but does not generate a trustful dialogue, e.g. too little time may be allocated for questions and people may perceive that the planners and/or the municipality are not open to discussion.	*The user-friendly EIA report and the summary are easy to navigate and understand (see step 7).) *The public hearing is announced in a visible way, using key relevant channels. *A public meeting is organized, following best-practice for fostering a good dialogue. Meeting tools outlined in Section 4 of this document are applied as appropriate.

Phase	Key activities	Dialogue - risks	Dialogue - opportunities
Duration: Minimum 8 weeks	administration and the politicians, the municipality will announce the public hearing, host a public meeting, and collect responses.		*A draft project authorization including conditions for approval, demands for monitoring and plans for inspections is included with the hearing materials (point 10).
10 Political/ administrative process followed by a white paper from the public hearing *(a white paper is not mandatory)*	Prior to the political decision-making, the municipality may produce a white paper summarizing the inputs received and the municipality's responses.	*A white paper is not produced, which leaves people in the dark as to how and if their input has been used. This can cause mistrust in the authorities. *A white paper is produced but does not provide sufficient insight into how hearing responses have been treated. *The white paper contains relevant and detailed information but uses a messy layout/structure. This may cause frustration and detract from the transparency that it intends to provide. *If the municipality's responses to individual points of concern are too superficial, people may feel their comments have not been treated seriously. *Lack of a physical meeting with room for discussion may exacerbate frustrations.	*A proper white paper is produced, responding to all stakeholders' key points. *The white paper gives people insight into how their inputs have been used. *The white paper provides maximum clarity and is well structured, so it is easy to navigate and understand the links between the citizens' points and the municipality's corresponding responses. *A public meeting is organized to present the white paper, and respond to people's requests for clarification.
11 Political/ administrative process including authorization or rejection *Followed by a 4-week formal complaint period*	The municipality authorizes the developer to move ahead with the project, and announces this in public.	*If the authorization implies negative surprises for the local community, frustrations may arise. People may feel misled during previous phases.	*Negative surprises have been prevented by providing a draft authorization earlier (step 7) *The authorization is communicated properly. *The authorization is clearly worded. *The municipality remains open to dialogue. * Citizens receive clear and adequate information about the possibilities, rules, and procedures for submitting formal complaints about the decision.
12 Monitoring	The planned monitoring is conducted and reported.	*The monitoring does not cover impacts of key concern to the local people. *People may not know that monitoring is carried out and what the outcome is.	*Monitoring includes impacts that are of main concern to the local communities. *Results are fed back into the community and clarify what is done in case of irregularities in the monitored impacts. *Local residents are involved in carrying out monitoring to give them hands-on experience and ownership.

Note: The dialogue does not end with the authorization of the project. E.g. monitoring continues and members of the community may submit formal complaints. Thus, continued constructive dialogue   remains important, in particular during the project's realization and in the first years after the renewable energy facility has been established.

4 DIALOGUE GUIDANCE & TOOLS

Fostering a good dialogue requires strategy and planning based on a thorough understanding of the EIA process and its stages.

The list of tools and approaches below can be applied at different stages of the EIA process (see section 3). The selection of specific tools/approaches depends on the specifics of the individual project, such as the size of the affected community, the resources available, etc.

JOINT COMMUNICATION PLAN

A joint communication plan covering the entire EIA process may be a vital instrument to ensure an early and constructive dialogue. The plan outlines all efforts to communicate with the local community, including meetings.

We recommend that the relevant municipality will 'own' the plan and take the lead in coordinating its development and overseeing its implementation.

However, this does not mean that the municipality will develop or execute the plan all on its own.

On the contrary, the plan should be created in a participatory process involving all actors including key community organization representatives and citizens engaged in the process. This will boost transparency, ensure that the community receives the right information in the right format and at the right level, and ensure all actors take ownership of the process.

Also, all parties should be jointly committed to executing the plan, according to agreed roles and responsibilities. The exact distribution of responsibilities may vary between projects.

In developing the plan, the group may use the toolkit below to pick, choose and adapt specific tools and design the approaches used for each step of the EIA.

All parties must accept the premise that the communication plan is a living document and may need adjustment over time.

Please see Annex 1 for an outline of the contents of an EIA communication plan.
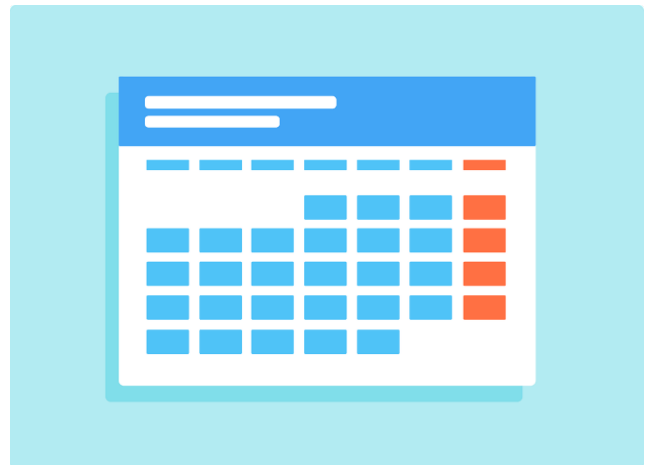
TOOLKIT

This toolkit includes a mixture of specific tools, process designs and approaches that are generally seen as best-practice for encouraging public participation. The purpose is to provide basic inspiration in designing the communication throughout the EIA time period (and beyond).

The field of public participation is vast, and the sources listed in Annex 2 – as indeed many other sources - may provide additional ideas beyond those selected for this toolkit.

Tool/approach	Description
1 Clear language	It is important that the communication is always done at eye level with the citizens. All written and verbal communication should therefore use a clear and accessible language. Technical jargon should be kept to a minimum; where technical terms cannot be avoided, they should be properly explained, preferably using examples from people's everyday experiences (e.g. noise levels can be compared to the sound of tumble-drying).
2 Citizen panel	A citizen panel may be set up to ensure a smooth ongoing communication between the local community and the developers and planners, and for consulting key communication outputs, such as the invitation to join the public hearing[2].
3 Accessible information	Ensure adequate and complete information is easily accessible online and through adequate channels (may include direct letters/emails, the local press and radio, physical posters in strategic places, etc.) At each stage of the process, consider the information that the citizens need and would like to have, and provide it in user-friendly language and format. Reduce complexity where possible without removing key information.
4 Face-to-face meetings	Hold frequent physical meetings, beyond what is legally required. Physical presence of the planners in the local area allows for ample direct communication and face-to-face dialogue with the local people at an early stage. The meetings should follow best-practice, including: • Prepare well for each meeting; ensure enough expertise is present to respond adequately to concerns and questions that are likely to be raised by the public. • Be well prepared with regard to the practicalities, such as projector, light and sound, so you do not have to focus on practical aspects during the meeting. • Ensure good facilitation of the meeting. Use an experienced facilitator, preferably someone who knows the local area and the inhabitants. • Be clear on the exact purpose of the meeting, how it ties in with previous and upcoming public meetings, and how the outcome will feed into the process.

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[2] In the UK, developers often make use of community liaison officers or groups who are hired from within the community and who act as the permanent link between the community and the planners and developers.

Tool/approach	Description
	• Provide balanced speaking time for citizens to voice their concerns on the one hand, and for experts and others to address those concerns on the other hand. • Consider the form of the meeting. Consider setting aside part of the time for discussions in smaller groups, allowing more citizens to speak freely - some people are not comfortable with public speaking. Ensure that there are experts present in each group to provide facts and perspective. • Bring in experts as well as local politicians. • Arrange so experts, politicians, municipality people can sit down with the citizens. • Try to organize the meeting in such a way that using a microphone is not necessary. • Set aside enough time for the meeting (add an extra hour) • Plan for good timing of the meeting. Late afternoon or evenings are best (generally, people are at work until 4 PM) • Follow-up on the meeting and ensure the local community receives feedback on how their inputs have been incorporated into the process.
5 Clear announcements of events, white papers, decisions, etc.	It is important that public information is seen by the public. It is advisable to go beyond the classic (and rather passive) information channels, such as advertisements in the local paper and information on the municipality website. In addition to these basic approaches, consider using posters in strategic local places and direct mails/letters to local key bodies such as the city council, citizens' associations, key NGOs etc. and the local radio. For public meetings, consider including the agenda in the announcements, to make clear what the meeting is about.
6 Involvement of citizens in decision-making	The local community should be involved in discussing alternative locations of the project, mitigation measures, compensatory measures, etc. A citizen jury may be set up[3].
7 Consistent feedback	It is important for people to know that their input is being used by the planners/developers, and how it is being used. It is key to have procedures in place ensuring that this feedback is provided and in a clear and consistent manner, using relevant communication channels.
8 In-depth information about citizen's views	Conduct citizens' opinion polls, online surveys and/or interviews at regular intervals, to uncover the general stance towards specific issues.
9 Information and dialogue about benefits	Early in the process, people should be informed about the four Renewable Energy economic schemes that can help set off drawbacks of the intended project. The municipality should take an active approach to 'grøn ordning', involving citizens in the process of using this incentive scheme to create benefits for the local community. In addition, the planners/developers should identify and inform about all other potential benefits of the project, and ask citizens for inputs.

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[3] Experiments with citizen jurys have been carried out in Scotland.

Tool/approach	Description
10 Presentation of the bigger context	The project should also be presented in the context of the larger story of climate change, the need for renewable energy expansion, and the goals of the local municipality in support of national policy. E.g. make clear how the local community can be part of the solution and take pride in their municipality's efforts. How much CO_2 will the atmosphere be spared due to this project?
11 Citizens' stories	Consider using storytelling focusing on specific people/personas to describe how the citizens feel towards the project.
12 Visual elements and graphic process illustrations	Images, graphics and other visual elements can help people to understand complex information. For example, a simple graphic outline of the specific EIA process, emphasizing when and how the local community is going to be involved and how their inputs will be used.
13 Excursions	Excursions, e.g. to see similar projects that are already in operation, can be a very valuable tool in creating a realistic perception of what the energy facility will 'feel' like. Discussions based on what people see and experience can provide additional quality to the dialogue.
14 Visualizations and noise examples: Making the scale of impacts tangible	You can help citizens to get a more realistic understanding of what the project will mean for them through visualizations, models, and noise examples. This can help reduce exaggerated fears as well as create realistic expectations preventing negative surprises later on.
15 Facebook group	Create a Facebook group for ongoing dialogue with and between citizens, in between formal dialogue processes and physical meetings.
16 Hotline	If a project is highly contentious, a hotline with established hours of operation may be set up, making it easy for citizens to call the municipality and get qualified answers to their questions and concerns related to the project.
17 Mobile task force	A small team of experts may be set up that offers to come to the local community and meet with local groups whenever they need some clarification or want to discuss the implications of the project.

ANNEX 1 COMMUNICATION PLAN OUTLINE

1 Introduction: Briefly presents the context and background for the communication plan. It also presents how the communication plan was created and who participated in its development.

2 Purpose: Presents the purpose of the communication plan and what it seeks to achieve.

3 "X village" – brief description of the local community, their current situation and key perceptions, fears, and wishes.

4 The process of citizen dialogue and involvement: Presents the overall EIA process, emphasizing the dialogue with the local community. A graphic overview will be the best approach.

5 Key facts and messages: The parties behind the plan will reach consensus on what's important to communicate on the overall level. This exercise should be reiterated for each step of the EIA process.

6 Communication activities: This is the bulk of the plan. For each step in the EIA process (see section 3), the plan describes what will be done to communicate the project and foster open dialogue, with a view to the specific challenges that are involved at the specific stage of the process.

The EIA Dialogue Toolkit (section 4) can be the starting point for selecting and designing the activities, and tailor them to the individual context. The activity plan includes physical events as well as media outreach, online information, etc.

At minimum, the activity plan should answer the following questions:

- Which information needs will the community have at each stage? How can these needs best be met?
- Who is responsible for communicating what – and when?
- Who is responsible for ensuring communities' involvement at each stage?
- Which communication channels are most appropriate?
- Who are the target groups /dialogue partners for each communication activity?
- Which tools should be used for each activity?

7 Regular evaluation: The plan includes a plan for evaluating and adjusting the elements of the plan on a regular basis, ensuring that it meets new needs as they arise.

8 ANNEXES
At minimum, the Communication Plan will include the following key annexes:
- A: Time plan outlining communication activities and who is in charge.
- B: Stakeholder analysis. A brief outline of each stakeholder group including the various community groups and what is known of their wishes, fears, and priorities at the outset.
- C: List of stakeholder groups including contact details.
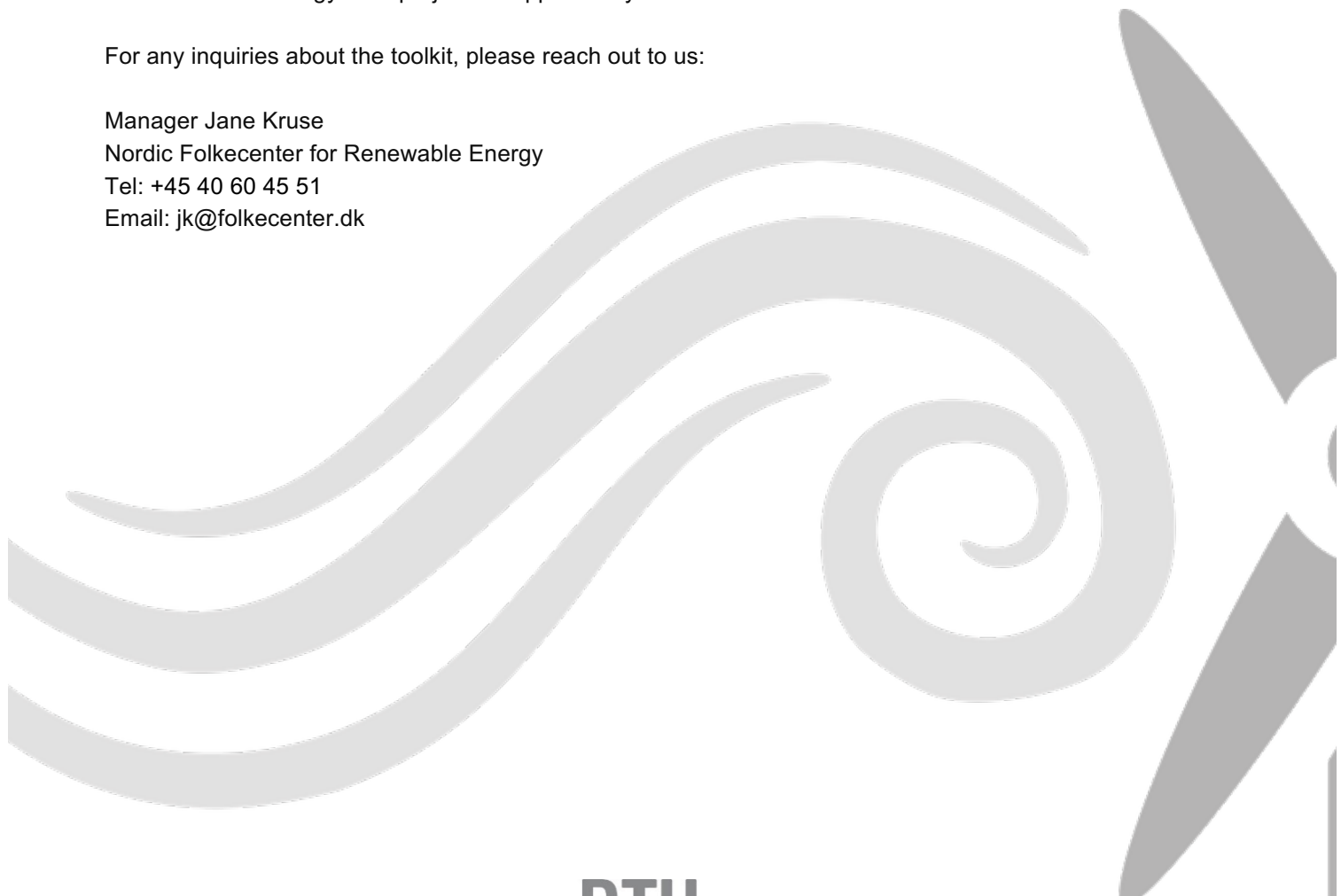
ANNEX 2 REFERENCES

The following sources have provided key background and inspiration for this toolkit.

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8. Hvad er god VVM-kommunikation for DN. Slides by Danish Nature Conservation Society LINK
9. Engagement Streams Framework (2013). National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation. LINK
10. Extensive list of public participation methods provided by Participationcompass.org. LINK
11. Core values for the practice of public participation, by IAP2. LINK

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