

BRIDGING DIVIDES



Handbook

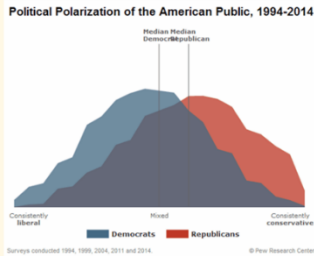
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Political Polarization



Political Polarization

- Public trust in the federal government is stuck at **historic lows**
- Pew Research found that 55% of Democrats and 49% of Republicans are “afraid” of the other party.
- A quarter of both Democrats and Republicans would support policies that harmed the other party — even if they also harmed their country as well.
- Perhaps most striking is the false belief held among 49% of Democrats and 47% of Republicans that the other party dislikes them simply because of their political affiliation. In fact, recent research shows that only 18% of each party actually dislikes members of the other.

Why is this happening?

- Rapid Demographic Change
- Globalization
- Distrust
- Rapid Disruption of the Media
- Pandemic

What can we do about it?

- Appreciate that there are **shared values**
- Get to know people and their multiple identities, not just their political identity (know them as a Mom/Dad, a coach, etc.)
- Work harder to better **understand** (not necessarily *agree with*) the views of the other side: understanding helps people identify solutions
- Dialogue to build common ground and develop integrative solutions.

Polarization is definitely happening, but it’s not the whole story.

Our experience at OCDR is that when people come together using thorough collaborative processes and the science of human relations, they are able to build common ground on even the most contentious issues. There is research to support this. We challenge the self-defeating narrative of a hopelessly divided America that is so profoundly divided that we cannot possibly understand each other, let alone find common ground or work together to achieve common ends.

So, what is going on?

Various aspects of identity have become less prominent and partisan identity has become more prominent. The strength of people’s attachment to their political parties now surpasses affiliations with their own race, religion and other social categories. The strength of that partisan bond – stronger than race, religion or ethnicity – has amplified the level of political polarization in the U.S.

Unlike race, religion and gender, where social norms dictate behavior – there are few, if any, constraints on the expression of hostility toward people who adhere to opposing political ideologies. The rhetoric and behavior of party leaders suggests to voters that it is perfectly acceptable to treat opponents with disdain. A great resource on this is ***‘Love Your Enemies’***, a book by Arthur Brooks.

NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

The Five Step
**PROBLEM
SOLVING**

PROCESS:

1. PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET
2. ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE
3. GENERATE OPTIONS
4. INTEGRATIVE SOLUTIONS
5. REACH AGREEMENT

Today's Objectives

Increase your ability to:

- Learn what to do when emotions run high
- De-escalate difficult situations
- Work with difficult people to clarify their Positions/Interests
- Identify what people need to move forward
- Develop integrative solutions

Elements of Managing Conflict

1. Understanding Conflict
2. Problem Solving Mindset
3. Interest Based Problem Solving
4. Emotion and Identity
5. Communication Skills
6. The Problem-Solving Process

About OCDR

The State of Minnesota's Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution (OCDR)

- Located in the MN Department of Administration
- Uses collaborative processes and the science of human relations to help government and stakeholders improve relationships, build trust, and develop wise and durable solutions to seemingly intractable issues.
- www.mn.gov/admin/ocdr/

As we roll through the presentation today think about how all of this relates to a difficult situation you've seen or been a part of – think of how you can use this information can help!

✓ **TIP::** When you are experiencing a difficult situation, it is very helpful to remember that everyone involved has shared values, in spite of having different ideas about outcomes and solutions.

NOTES

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

What is Conflict?

What's the first word you think of when you hear "conflict"?

Conflict is the perceived incompatibility of interests, needs and goals

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT



WHAT LIES UNDERNEATH



A lot goes on in conflict but the root of it is a fear that people won't be able to get their needs met.

Understanding conflict in this way helps us approach the situation from a place of compassion and understanding rather than defensiveness and anger. This leads to quicker, easier, and better resolutions.

Because most of us have mostly negative experiences with conflict, we think of it as a negative thing, but conflict has a lot of **positive** potential. We can learn how to minimize the destructive aspects of conflict and maximize the positive ones.

The better we are at identifying the root of the conflict, the better we will be at resolving it in a mutually beneficial way.

A lot goes on in conflict but the root of it is a Fear that people won't be able to get their needs met. Understanding conflict in this way helps us approach the situation from a place of compassion and understanding rather than defensiveness and anger.

There is a lot going on in conflict. That is why it is so difficult to manage effectively.

Emotion, worldview, and unmet needs are big drivers of conflict.

People have underlying needs that must be addressed in order to understand the conflict and begin the work to resolve it.

NOTES

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT



Basic Human Needs and the Root of Conflict

Many psychologist, philosophers, and other wise people figured out that human behavior is driven by the imperative to fulfill a universal set of basic human needs. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is the most famous version. Maslow (1943, 1954) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs

and that some needs take precedence over others.

Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on. The original hierarchy of needs five-stage model includes.

1. **Physiological needs** - these are biological requirements for human survival, e.g. air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sleep.
2. **Safety and security needs** - protection from elements, sense of security for self and loved ones, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.
3. **Love and belongingness needs** – Human beings are social animals like some other mammals and birds (wolves, lions). Like these animals, human survival depends on membership in groups. The need for interpersonal relationships motivates a very large amount of human behavior. Examples of these needs include friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, affiliation, receiving and giving affection and love.
4. **Esteem needs** - which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, role).
5. **Self-actualization needs** - realizing personal potential, sense of meaning and purpose, spiritual growth, contribution, and peak experiences

NOTES

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT



This is a list of needs that are particularly salient in the workplace. Managers can prevent and more effectively resolve conflicts by understanding these needs and proactively developing strategies to ensure that the workplace helps employees to meet these needs. The five needs listed here not distinct but interwoven.

Appreciation: When a person is appreciated, it often results in the person demonstrating enthusiasm,

affection, cheerfulness, and caring. A person in this state will often be prone to cooperate more. A person who is unappreciated will often feel angry and disgusted.

Affiliation: Affiliation describes the sense of connectedness with another person or group. When a person is treated as a colleague, he or she tends to feel more appreciated, compassionate and flexible. These emotions tend to make a person more prone to work together. The person who is treated as an adversary is more apt to feel resentful or irritated. This person will be more prone to go it alone rather than work together.

Autonomy: When a person's freedom to decide is acknowledged, emotions such as being proud, happy, and accomplished are evoked. These emotions tend to make a person prone to being creative. On the other hand, when autonomy is impinged, the emotions of guilt, shame, and remorse often arise, leading to a person thinking more rigidly.

Status: When a person's status is recognized, she will often feel more calm, relieved, and relaxed. This tends to make a person more prone to be trustworthy. When a person's status is put down, she may feel humiliated and embarrassed. People with these feelings are more prone to act deceptively and be seen as untrustworthy. (Note that they are seen as untrustworthy, not necessarily are untrustworthy.) Negative emotions arise out of the competition for status. Acknowledging another's status before acknowledging your own, can harbor positive emotions.

Role: When a person's role is fulfilling and includes activities that illustrate and convince the person that he makes a difference, he is likely to feel motivated. When a person's role is trivialized and restricted, he may feel envious, jealous, or become apathetic.

NOTES

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Neuroscience of Conflict

Conflict wreaks havoc on your brain: This is how we are ‘hard-wired’

- Our brain senses a threat / conflict and floods our system with stress hormones (adrenaline, cortisol) which leads to
- increased heart rate; shallow and rapid breathing; sweaty palms, etc., then
- we lose access to the prefrontal cortex (the part of our brain that solves complex problems), then
- our attention narrows and rather than understand multiple perspectives we get trapped in one perspective: ‘I am right and you’re wrong’

You are in the grip of an automatic fight or flight or freeze reaction!

So what can you do? You can’t stop this from happening, but you can manage it:

- Recognize what is happening – pay attention to your body and mind during tough situations.
- Take actions to relax yourself such as taking deep breaths, counting, walking, etc.
- Take a break from the triggering situation if possible
- Once calmer, reflect on what triggered you and how you responded.
- Only now reflect on how you want to address the triggering issue.
- Practice the skills in this handbook to build your capacity to respond better when a tough situation happens; to become a problem solver

Conflict Styles

Lots of research has been done about the default ways that people approach conflict. It turns out that people have one of several default approaches or styles. Knowing your style can help you to build on its strengths and address its weaknesses. Knowledge of conflict styles can also help you understand the behavior of people with styles that are not your style.

If you are interested in knowing more about your conflict style check out the conflict assessments at <http://www.thewesleygroup.com/dynad.pdf> and <https://icsinventory.com/>



NOTES

A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET

MINDSET

A mindset is a belief that orients the way we handle situations – the way we sort out what is going on and what we should do.



Mindsets aren't just any beliefs: They are beliefs that orient our reactions and tendencies. (A great resource is the book '**Mindset**' by Carol Dweck. For example, Sherlock Holmes has a 'detective' mindset.

Mindsets serve several cognitive (or mental) functions.

- There is a lot of information in the world. Mindsets direct our attention to the most important cues, so that we're not overwhelmed with information
- They suggest sensible goals so that we know what we should be trying to achieve
- They prime us with reasonable courses of action so that we don't have to puzzle out what to do in this complicated world

You may have heard of the concept of growth versus fixed mindsets. Today we are going to be talking about a different kind of mindset, the mindset that leads to effective ways of handling differences and solving public problems.

Everyone wants 'skills' or a 'checklist' to deal with conflict situations. But skills aren't very effective in the absence of a Problem-Solving Mindset!

NOTES

A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET

PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET	
Problem Solving Mindset	
Traditional Approach	Problem Solving Approach
Goal: Win	Goal: Wise outcome
Participants: adversaries	Participants: joint problem solvers
Attack problem <u>and</u> people	Concentrate on the problem
Assume negative intentions	Presume positive intent

Instead of Fight or Flight – you can learn a better approach by using a Problem Solving Mindset

Goal: Win / Wise outcome – beat the other person or get what we went into it wanting *versus* a common good type outcome

Participants – joint problem solvers – recognize that you have something in common with this person. You both have a problem that needs to be solved. Instead of framing it as cheap, unethical citizens are trying to get the city to cover costs of flooding that have nothing to do with City and City is shirking responsibility and doesn't care /vs./ community has issues with flooding that need to be resolved in an efficient manner

Concentrate on the problem – people can want or need different things and not have a conflict. I might want to go on vacation in the mountains and my spouse wants to go to the beach. Without acrimony we decide to go to Ecuador where they have both or we decide to go the beach this year and the mountains next year. The difference turns into a conflict when it becomes about the person and our relationship. For example, if I start to think, he never listens to me, he doesn't care about what I want, we always have to do what he wants. I bet he thinks what he wants is more important because he makes more money than me. He is such a jerk. So stay focused on the problem. As for the person, give them the benefit of the doubt, think about those shared values, presume positive intent

Presume positive intent - vast majority of people don't wake up thinking how can I make the world a worse place today. Doesn't mean that they don't do harmful, hurtful, ineffective things but means they so because they really believe it is the best course of action, because they don't know what else to do, because they are having a bad day (or decade) or for some other reason that isn't that they are a terrible person with horrible motives. This is so important because people can feel if you think they are up to no good, a rotten apple, etc. It is also important because learning about their true motive gives you crucial information for problem solving.

NOTES

A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET

PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET	
Problem Solving Mindset	
Traditional Approach	Problem Solving Approach
Focus on position	Focus on underlying INTERESTS
Assume I am right	Assume I need to learn their story
Come with “the” solution	Willing to explore options

Focus on underlying INTERESTS – Position is the solution we demand. Interest is the why/need we are trying to meet. For example, a barking dog dispute between two neighbors. Or in Falcon Heights, the issue of cancelling a contract versus having a diverse, well-trained, responsive police force focused on community based policing. Interests are not mutually exclusive and identifying them can lead to win/win or integrative solutions.

Assume I need to learn their story – This doesn’t mean that other people’s point of view is scientifically provable, factually accurate, that we agree with it, etc., but it does mean that it is as real for them as our point of view is for us. This is important for a few reasons. First, if we dismiss the perspectives of others as wrong, crazy, or irrational they will be unwilling to engage in resolving the issue at hand. Second, to resolve the issue you will need to identify a solution in which both sides get some of their most important interests addressed. If there isn’t something in it for everyone, the folks who are the loser will keep fighting the issue one way or another. In order to identify mutually acceptable/beneficial solutions, you must be able to generate options that address the interests of the other side. Trying to understand their point of view will enable you to identify their interests. Even in cases where an issue cannot be resolved in a mutually acceptable manner, trying to understand and appreciate each other’s point of view increases mutual respect and fosters civil disagreement.

Willing to explore options – Seek to identify options that meet some of the most important needs/interests of everyone involved. This is win/win or integrative problem solving.

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A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET

PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET

Developing a Problem-Solving Mindset

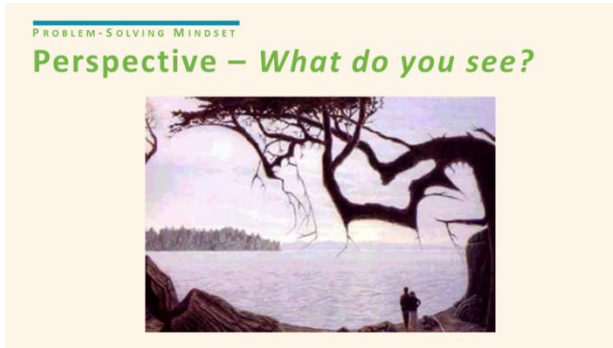
- The goal is a wise outcome, not to 'win'
- Try to become joint problem solvers
- Focus on the problem, not the person
- Presume a positive, not a negative, intent
- You need to understand their story first
- Identify and focus on the underlying **Interests**
- Be curious, and willing to explore options

• **See yourselves as joint problem solvers seeking a wise outcome** – Conflict partners must recognize that they have something in common. They both have a problem that needs to be solved. Conflict partners are much more likely to reach a mutually beneficial resolution if they see each other as joint problem solvers seeking a wise outcome rather than adversaries seeking to beat each other.

- **Focus on the problem, not the person** – People can want or need different things and not have a conflict. The difference in desired outcome turns into a conflict when it becomes about the person and the relationship. So, stay focused on the problem. As for the person, give him or her the benefit of the doubt, think about those shared values, and presume positive intent.
- **Assume positive intent** – People sometimes do harmful, hurtful, and ineffective things, but they do so because they believe it is the best course of action; because they don't know what else to do; because they are having a bad day; or for some other reason that isn't that they are a terrible person with horrible motives. This is important not only because people won't want to problem solve with you if you think they are a terrible person, but because learning about their true motives and interests gives you crucial information for problem solving.
- **Question assumptions** - Try to identify some negative ideas you have about the person you are in a conflict with and explore whether those ideas might be inaccurate. Ask questions of the person or persons you are in conflict with to explore whether your negative assumptions are correct.
- **Assume you need to learn their story** – This doesn't mean that other person's point of view is scientifically provable, factually accurate, that you agree with it, etc., but it does mean that *it is as real for them as your point of view is for you*. This is important for a couple reasons. First, if we dismiss the perspectives of others as wrong, crazy, or irrational they will be unwilling to engage in resolving the issue at hand. Second, to resolve the issue you will need to identify a solution in which both sides get some of their most important interests addressed. If there isn't something in it for everyone, the folks who are the loser will keep fighting the issue one way or another.
- **Try to figure out what need they are trying to meet and their underlying Interests.** Also, think about what needs you need to have met.
- **Get curious** - Remind yourself of how much you don't know about this complex world of ours. Open your mind to surprises.

NOTES

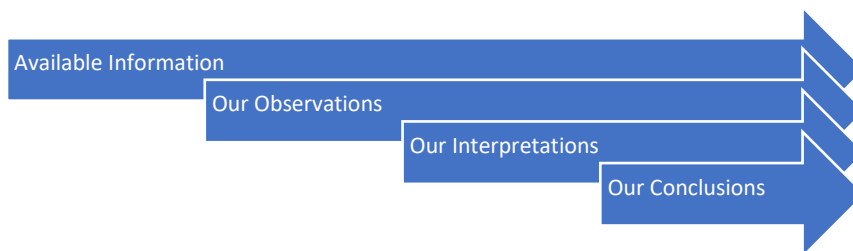
A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET – PERSPECTIVE TAKING



What do you see?

In the first image, some people will see a couple standing on a lakeshore and others a newborn lying on its back. In the second image, some people will see a duck, and others a rabbit. Because we know different people may see things differently for all kinds of reasons including life experience, background, etc., it becomes even more important to clarify perceptions and ask open ended questions.

Why do people see things differently? Lots of reasons:



It is valuable to get all of the information so we can see things more clearly, and also see things from the perspective of the other person more clearly.

Because people won't want to problem solve with us if we dismiss their point of view as crazy, irrational, wrong, etc.

PERSPECTIVE

Being able to see someone else's perspective doesn't mean that they are right or that you agree with them.

It simply means that you are willing to acknowledge that it is the experience of the other person, and therefore true for her.

NOTES

A PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET – THE TRUTH ASSUMPTION



Based on our perceptions we assume we are right. Then we get stuck right off the bat arguing about what happened and who is right. This is the TRUTH ASSUMPTION.

What we are saying does make sense. What’s often hard to see is that what the other person is saying also makes sense. All of us, no matter how smart and sophisticated we are, when embroiled in a conflict,

start to think that the other side is crazy, wrong, malicious, unbalanced, etc. And they think the same thing about us. We forget that their story/perspective/interpretation makes as much sense to them as our does to us.

So, the first thing that needs to happen to resolve a conflict is to explore the other side’s story and figure out how it makes sense to them. To get anywhere in a disagreement we need to understand the other person’s story well enough to see how their conclusion make sense within it. And we need to help them understand the story in which our conclusion also make sense.

Difficult conversations are not about getting facts rights. They are about perceptions, interpretations, and values. They are not about what is true but what is important

Moving away from the TRUTH ASSUMPTION frees us to shift from proving we are right to understanding the perceptions, interpretations, and values of both sides and from exploring how each is making sense of world and to offer our views as perceptions, interpretations, and values – not the truth.

We need to do this because people won’t want to problem solve with us if we dismiss their point of view as crazy, irrational, wrong, etc. and because in order to find solutions we will need to understand what is important to them.

To get beyond the TRUTH ASSUMPTON, create a Learning Conversation!

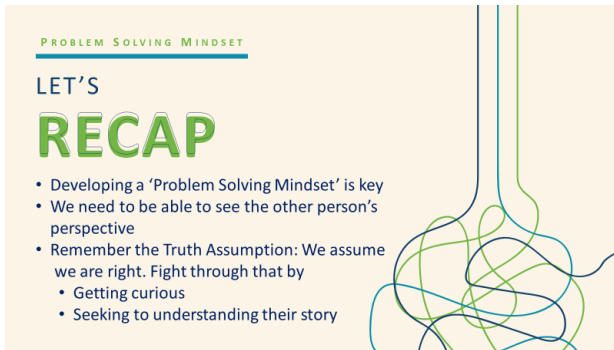
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Truth Assumption	Learning Conversation
Get curious and embrace an “and stance”	
<p>Assumption: I know all I need to know to understand what happened.</p> <p>Goal: Persuade them I’m right.</p>	<p>Assumption: Each of us is bringing different information and perceptions to the table; there are likely to be important things that each of us doesn’t know.</p> <p>Goal: Explore each other’s stories; how we understand the situation and why</p>
Question assumptions about intent	
<p>Assumption: I know what they intended.</p> <p>Goal: Let them know what they did was wrong.</p>	<p>Assumption: I know what I intended, and the impact their actions had on me. I don’t and can’t know what’s in their head.</p> <p>Goal: Share the impact on me and find out what they were thinking. Also, find out what impact I’m having on them.</p>
Identify mutual contribution	
<p>Assumption: It’s all their fault. (Or it’s all my fault.)</p> <p>Goal: Get them to admit blame and take responsibility for making amends.</p>	<p>Assumption: We have probably both contributed to this mess.</p> <p>Goal: Understand the contribution system: how our actions interact to produce this result.</p>

NOTES

PROBLEM SOLVING MINDSET

How to put that mindset into practice



Everyone wants ‘Skills’ or a ‘checklist’ to deal with conflict....

But **first** you need to develop a Problem Solving Mindset !

We need to be able to see the other person’s perspective:

People won’t want to problem solve with us if we dismiss their point of view as crazy, irrational, wrong, etc.

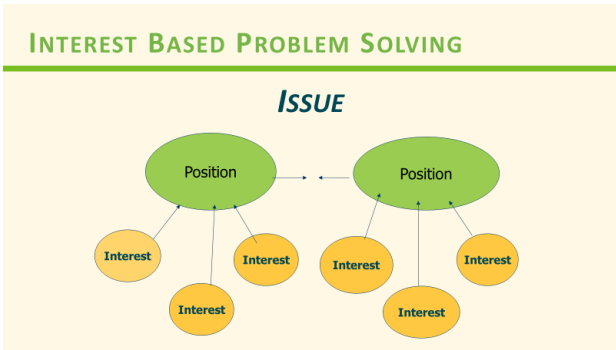
Too often we get stuck right off the bat arguing about what happened and who is right. Based on our perceptions we assume we are right. This is called the TRUTH ASSUMPTION.

We need to be Curious

We need to understand their story (we already know ours!)

NOTES

INTEREST BASED PROBLEM SOLVING



Issues: The issues or areas of controversy that people want to discuss

Positions: One side’s proposed solution to resolve the issue

Interests: Underlying needs, concerns, goals that must be satisfied to resolve the conflict

Interest Based Problem Solving’ is **THE KEY** to resolving conflicts!

Example 1 – Different interests

Two sisters, Sally and Emma, are arguing over the last lemon. They have the same position – I want the lemon! It turns out that their interests are different: Sally wants the juice to marinate some fish for dinner and Emma wants the rind for lemon poppy seed muffins for breakfast. Both can use the lemon.

Sometimes real life is this simple, but not usually.

Example 2 – Compatible interests

Amir is furious with his neighbor Paul because Paul’s dog barks day and night. Amir’s position is that Paul needs to get rid of his dog. Paul’s position is that is never going to happen. It turns out that Amir’s interest is being able to sleep during the day because he works at night. Paul’s interest is to get his dog out of the house during the day so that he doesn’t bark so much inside. Solution: Amir loans Paul the money for an obedience class that addresses excessive barking.

Example 3 – Incompatible interests, but different priorities

Sometimes parties’ interests are incompatible but because they prioritize different things, they can come up with an acceptable solution because the solution meets the highest priority needs of each party. *Example: A group of residents and organizations have been lobbying the City to alter a zoning ordinance to enable the County to build a new jail in their community. They argue that there is a desperate need for jobs in the community and that the jail would bring secure jobs with good benefits. Another group of residents and organizations are lobbying against the change. They argue that the jail will not only be an eyesore but pose security risks to the community, especially because the jail is for low-level offenders and will have a work release program. Since one group prioritizes their need for jobs and the other group prioritizes their need for safety, they could reach an agreement that the County will employ additional security personnel.*

NOTES

INTEREST BASED PROBLEM SOLVING

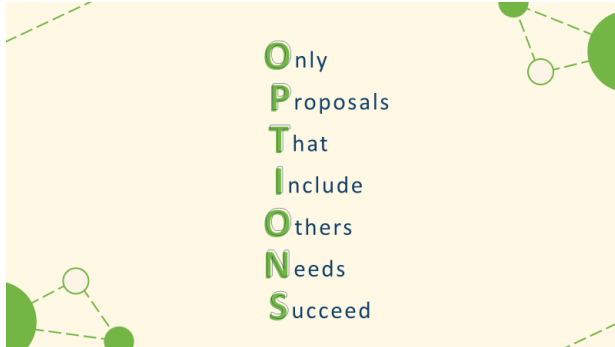
ACTIVITY:

POSITION

Someone complains that the county "spends too much money".

Underlying INTERESTS

Perhaps they feel their taxes are too high
 Perhaps they can't get over a bad project from years ago
 Perhaps they just lost their job or have other concerns
 Perhaps



ACTIVITY:

ISSUE

A new manufacturing facility is proposed to be built on the edge of town. The only access is by a county road that goes through a neighborhood and by an elementary school. There are two positions: 'Yes - Build It' or 'No - Don't Build It'.

What are the underlying interests of each side?

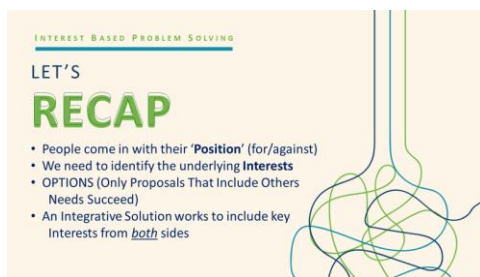


While compromise has unfortunately gotten a bad reputation, we think compromise is a viable option. However, many issues can't be satisfactorily resolved through a compromise. In those cases, the goal is to find an integrative solution - a solution that meets some of the most important needs of everyone involved. The examples on the most recent page are examples of integrative solutions.

Once you have done the essential work of:

- ✓ Remembering that you and your conflict partner have shared values
- ✓ Getting yourself into that 'problem solving mindset'
- ✓ Identifying the perspectives of everyone involved
- ✓ Identifying the interests of yourself and everyone involved

you are then ready to move into brainstorming integrative solutions. The acronym **OPTIONS** reminds us how to do this.



NOTES

EMOTION AND IDENTITY

Emotions & Identity:

Managing High Emotions

In their book, *Dealing with an Angry Public*, Lawrence Susskind and Patrick Field note that **people can get emotional—angry—in three situations:**

1. When people have been hurt;
2. When people feel threatened by risks not of their making; and
3. When they believe their fundamental beliefs are being challenged.

They note that **anger can be intensified when people feel:**

- Weak or powerless in the face of others who have power;
- Treated unfairly, disrespectfully or dishonestly; or
- Anger is a helpful way of rallying the troops, demonstrating one's own power, or bullying others into accepting their point of view.

Emotions & Identity:

Managing High Emotions

Susskind and Field recommend a strategy that focuses on building and maintaining a *long-term* relationship of trust between your organization and the community it serves.

This involves, among other things, being willing to

- 1) **share** information
- 2) **listen** to people's concerns, and
- 3) **learn** what steps might be taken to address those concerns.

Emotions & Identity:

TALKING ABOUT EMOTION



- Express emotion
- Unbundle emotion
- Explore your emotional footprint
- Separate feelings from judgements
- Negotiate with your feelings
- Acknowledge their feelings

Emotions are tricky for many people. However, there are several things that you can do to work productively with emotion in conflict.

Express your feelings

Because managing feelings can be enormously challenging, we often try to frame them out of the discussion. We try to frame the problem exclusively as a substantive issue.

For example, in discussing an employee's request for a raise, we are more comfortable keeping the conversation to matters of the budget, rather than the feeling of being valued or appreciated that will be fulfilled or unfulfilled by the decision about the raise.

However, it is generally impossible to resolve a conflict in a way that is enduring and that repairs relationships without addressing the feelings. This is true for three reasons.

1. People are not ready to problem solve until their feelings have been heard and acknowledged. Someone may propose a fair solution and the other person will reject it if she hasn't had a chance to express her feelings yet. The need to have our feelings be heard is part of human nature.
2. Unexpressed feelings will leak into the conversation through tone of voice and body language, defensiveness, aggression, and impatience.
3. Unexpressed feelings also block listening. We are unable to focus on what the other person is saying and look for where they might be right when we are still caught up in our own hurt and anger.

Unbundle your emotions

When asked in mediation how they feel, most people will say one of three feeling words. What do you think they are? They are upset, angry and sad – in that order. Why do you think people only use these words? In a conflict people are usually feeling many things.

For example, in telling a coworker that you are angry that she is taking credit for your work you may also feel nervous, embarrassed, and inadequate. Take the time to identify what all the feelings are. Though it might seem cheesy, reviewing a list of feeling words can help us identify what we are feeling.

Explore your emotional footprint

Based on our personalities, cultures, and especially family of origin, most of us are more comfortable with some emotions than with others. For some people sadness is very uncomfortable because it feels vulnerable and weak. For other people, anger is very uncomfortable because it feels dangerous and mean.

Being familiar with your emotional footprint can help you to challenge yourself to express the feelings that you are less comfortable with and to be less judgmental about the feelings of others.

For instance, if you are more comfortable with sadness than with anger, and your conflict partner is expressing anger, recognizing this dynamic can help you to feel less attacked.

Separate feelings from judgments

Sometimes people think that they are expressing their feelings when they say things like: I feel that if you were a good friend you would have called me every week while I was going through my divorce. This is a judgment about the other person. It is not a feeling. The feeling might be hurt, abandoned, or disappointed. Find the feeling behind the judgment and express it rather than the judgment.

Negotiate with your feelings

Most of us assume that we have little control over our feelings. We think: “This is just the way I feel”. The reality is that feelings are formed in response to our thoughts. The story that we are telling ourselves gives rise to our feelings. If we tell ourselves that our friend didn’t call because she is selfish or because she doesn’t care about me, we will feel different than if we tell ourselves that she didn’t call because she has never been divorced and so she doesn’t recognize how much support one needs during this time. Before expressing your feelings, take some time to negotiate with them.

Acknowledge their feelings

After feelings are expressed, each side must have their feelings acknowledged. You won’t be able to problem solve until you do so. Acknowledging the other person’s feelings doesn’t mean agreeing with them. It means that you show that their feelings matter to you and you are working to understand their perspective. You can say things like, “It sounds like this is really important to you.” or “I didn’t know you felt that way.”

So...listen for the emotion. People may say how they are feeling, but more often you will have to use cues such as facial expression, body language and tone of voice to identify the emotion. It is tempting to try to ignore feelings because they make us feel uncomfortable and we want to jump right into problem solving. However, you will find that you either won’t be able to reach a resolution, the relationship will not be healed, or the resolution won’t endure, if you have not included feelings in the conversation.

NOTES

EMOTION AND IDENTITY – IDENTITY

Emotions & Identity:

Identity 101

- Who I believe myself to be or not be.
- The story we tell ourselves about ourselves. It is our sense of who we are in the world.
- It is the answer to the statement, "If I know nothing else about myself, I know I am the kind of person who..."
- The sense of self, providing sameness and continuity in personality over time.

Emotions & Identity:

Core Identities – an example

- I am a
- Competent person
 - Good person
 - Person worthy of love

Emotions & Identity:

Working with Identity Issues

- Reflect on what identity issues might be at play for you
- Listen for what identity issues might be at play for your conflict partner
- Be willing to discuss those issues (however uncomfortable that might be 😊)
- Attempt to affirm core identities

EMOTIONS & IDENTITY

LET'S

RECAP

- Emotions play a big role in most conflict
- High Emotions require good listening (to better understand the emotion) and careful responses
- People have 'identities' (who they see themselves as in the world) and we need to understand how those fit into the persons underlying interests



Reflect on your own sense of identity for a moment. What aspects of your identity are most important to you? How would it feel if someone said or did something that threatened one of those aspects?

Some types of identities:

Personal – attitudes, values, religion (Lutheran, conservative, patriot)

Professional – role, status, title (plumber, manager, leader,)

Relational –parent, spouse, neighbor (mom, sister, friend)

Demographic – age, race, gender, ethnicity (millennial, senior, person of color)

When a person's sense of identity is threatened the conflict becomes more complex and more challenging to resolve. Like with emotion, the identity issues usually must be addressed before the substantive issues can be resolved. For example: When a manager gives an employee feedback about poor performance the employee's sense of being a hard worker, a valued employee, or competent may be threatened. This may cause a conflict to develop.

Research from the Harvard Negotiation project and many other sources has shown that almost all people are very concerned about three key identities. People have a deep and enduring need to feel that they are Competent, Good, and Worthy of love.

If a conflict or difficult situation causes a person to question one of these key identities, to ask themselves: "Am I competent, a good person, worthy of love?", it adds another layer to the conflict. The situation is no longer only about a substantive issue such as salary, job title, work schedules, etc. To resolve the substantive issue the parties will also need to address the identity issues.

NOTES

COMMUNICATION SKILLS - LISTENING

Communication Skills:

LISTENING 2.0

- ✓ Listen to Learn, not to Respond!
- ✓ First **Listen**: Then **Learn**: Only then can you **Lead**
- ✓ Listen beyond the words for the heart of the message.
Use body language, tone of voice, your own feelings and more.
- ✓ **Listening is the World's Most Powerful Skill** and a key to de-escalation and it will help difficult people articulate their positions and underlying interests.

Communication Skills:

LISTENING 2.0

PRACTICE LISTENING FOR NEEDS

Compassion	Freedom
Community	Justice
Connection	Harmony
Creativity	Inclusiveness
Equality	Trust
Family	Understanding

Communication Skills:

LISTENING 2.0

PRACTICE LISTENING FOR FEELINGS

Anxious	Grateful
Betrayed	Inadequate
Despairing	Lonely
Disappointed	Shocked
Disturbed	Uncomfortable
Eager	Worried

Communication Skills:

LISTENING 2.0

PRACTICE LISTENING FOR IDENTITIES

Mother	Millennial
Father	Senior
Muslim	Person of Color
Christian	Dependable
Conservative	Trustworthy
Liberal	Generous

The power and effectiveness of listening can't be overstated. Feeling heard is a basic human need. Sometimes just listening is enough to transform the conflict.

- ✓ Good listening isn't a gimmick. You can't "hmmm" and nod your way to a solution. If you are truly listening your body language and nonverbals will reflect that and if you aren't, they won't.
- ✓ Good listeners listen below the words for the essence of the message – needs, concerns, identity issues, feelings - and reflect those back to the other person so that she or he feels heard. Active or reflective listening isn't about parroting back every word, but rather checking-in to see if you are understanding the heart of the message, which can be spoken or communicated through nonverbals such as body language and tone of voice.
- ✓ Good listening is much harder than it seems. Good listeners have practices to cultivate good listening, practices that help them to quiet their own minds – mediation, prayer, exercise, etc.

NOTES

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication Skills:
SPEAKING TO REDUCE DEFENSIVENESS

Talk more about yourself and less about the other person.

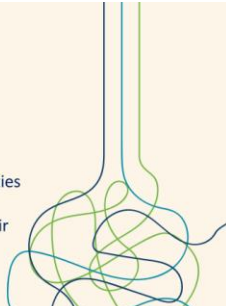
Talk about:

- ✓ What you feel
- ✓ What you need
- ✓ What you want
- ✓ Your contribution to the conflict

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

LET'S
RECAP

- Improve your listening (by practice)
 - Listen for needs / feelings / identities
 - Listen to learn, not to respond
- Talk less about the other person (their mistakes, intent, etc.)
 - Instead, use **I statements**
- Be less defensive



Use “I Statements” to talk more about yourself:

- ✓ how you feel
- ✓ what you want
- ✓ the impact on you
- ✓ your part in the conflict
- ✓ what you will do going forward

Talk less about the other person:

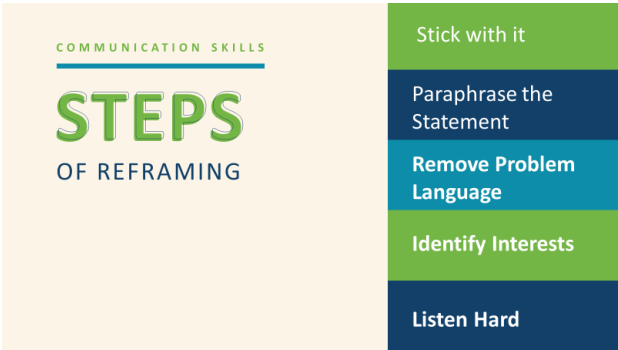
- ✓ their flaws
- ✓ their mistakes
- ✓ what they did
- ✓ what they should have done
- ✓ what you think their intentions are

Try covering these components in a way that feels natural to you:

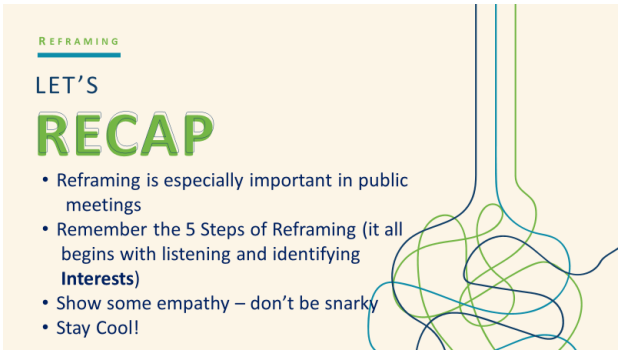
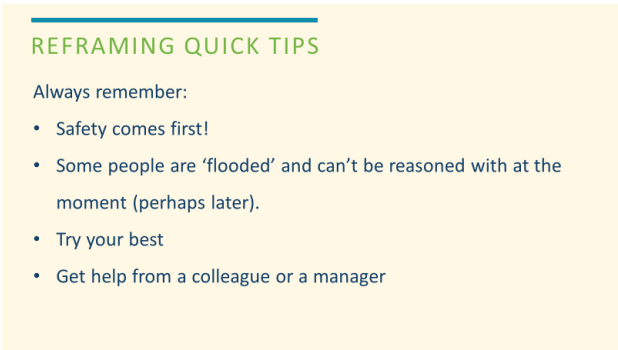
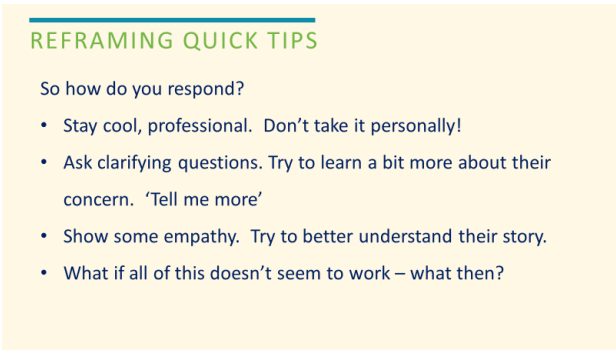
- I feel...
- When you...
- What I want is...
- My part is...
- You can count on me to....

<p><u>NOTES</u></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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REFRAMING



On challenging issues people hold passionate views. This may lead them to make statements that are negative, toxic, or unproductive. Your goal is to ‘reframe’ the statement so that you can better respond to their concern or need.



Principles of reframing

- ✓ Every strong statement contains some underlying interest or concern that promoted the strong statement.
- ✓ People usually want a constructive response to their statements.
- ✓ People can switch to more constructive communication when they believe that their needs or concerns are being dealt with.

NOTES



REFRAMING EXAMPLES

There is an increasing need for affordable housing all across the state of Minnesota. There are many ideas on why housing is so expensive in Minnesota (tough weather, amount of regulations, etc.). There are many reasons why some residents believe building affordable housing is imperative while others get anxious about it being built in their neighborhood.

Neutral language - eliminating toxic language, blame, and fault

Statement: Affordable housing will bring in people who won't contribute to the tax base and will be a drain on our community.

Reframe: _____

In terms of interest rather than positions

Statement: We can't allow any more subsidized units in this neighborhood because property values will plummet.

Reframe: _____

- Emphasize commonality of interests

Reframe: _____

- Defining the issues jointly, rather than from one participant's perspective

Reframe: _____

- In terms of a search for a common solution rather than a fight

Reframe: _____

- In light of the future, not the past

Statement: Before The Landing (a low income development) was closed, shoplifting at the mall was out of control.

Reframe: _____

- In behavioral terms, rather than character or personality

Statement: Those tenants will be irresponsible and destructive.

Reframe: _____

- From non-negotiables such as values, attitude, or feeling to negotiables such as behaviors or systems.

Statement: If you won't agree to add 500 affordable housing units, we will know you are don't care about people who have less opportunity than you do.

Reframe: _____

- As an individual component of the problem (neither too global nor too specific).

Statement: This city is going to go broke.

Reframe: _____



REFRAMING EXAMPLES

There is an increasing need for affordable housing all across the state of Minnesota. There are many ideas on why housing is so expensive in Minnesota (tough weather, amount of regulations, etc.). There are many reasons why some residents believe building affordable housing is imperative while others get anxious about it being built in their neighborhood.

Neutral language - eliminating toxic language, blame, and fault

Statement: Affordable housing will bring in people who won't contribute to the tax base and will be a drain on our community.

Reframe: You want to build a community in which all members contribute to where they live.

In terms of interest rather than positions

Statement: We can't allow any more subsidized units in this neighborhood because property values will plummet.

Reframe: You are seeking a solution which will protect property values.

- Emphasize commonality of interests
Reframe: Despite our differences, I hear everyone here tonight saying that they are here because they care about their community.
- Defining the issues jointly, rather than from one participant's perspective
Reframe: We are seeking ways to make our community affordable and to do it in a way that fosters the growth that we have been benefiting from.
- In terms of a search for a common solution rather than a fight
Reframe: We are all here tonight to try to find ways to make our community affordable and prosperous.
- In light of the future, not the past
Statement: Before The Landing (a low income development) was closed, shoplifting at the mall was out of control.
Reframe: It sounds like you are looking for solutions that will keep our community safe.
- In behavioral terms, rather than character or personality
Statement: Those tenants will be irresponsible and destructive.
Reframe: It is important to you that the property is kept in good condition.
- From non-negotiables such as values, attitude, or feeling to negotiables such as behaviors or systems.
Statement: If you won't agree to add 500 affordable housing units, we will know you don't care about people who have less opportunity than you do.
Reframe: It sounds like the change won't seem like a meaningful commitment unless the number of units is substantial.
- As an individual component of the problem (neither too global nor too specific).
Statement: This city is going to go broke.
Reframe: Ensuring that the tax base isn't reduced is key to you.

THE PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

The Five Step PROBLEM SOLVING

PROCESS:

1. PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET
2. ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE
3. GENERATE OPTIONS
4. INTEGRATIVE SOLUTIONS
5. REACH AGREEMENT

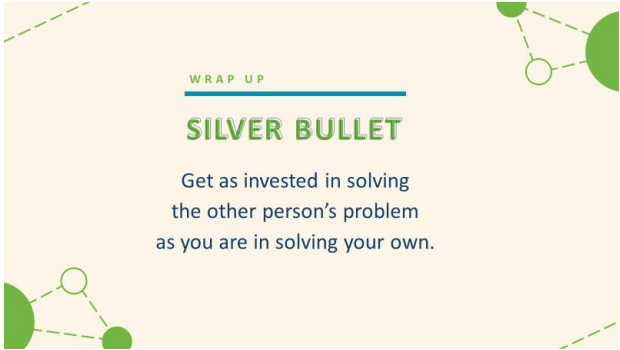
1. **Agree on the problem** or decision to be made. Can you describe it as neutral, third party might? As a joint problem? As a difference between two perspectives?
2. **Engage in dialogue** to exchange information and to increase understanding of diverse points of view. This step is applying all of the skills we have talked about today:
 - a. Problem solving mindset
 - b. Listening
 - c. Perception taking
 - d. Speaking to reduce defensiveness
 - e. Identifying needs and interests

Do not move on to generating options without first engaging in extensive dialogue. Doing so will likely make the conflict harder to solve later.

3. **Generate OPTIONS** for mutual gain based on shared interests. Brainstorm. Encourage creative ideas.
4. **Develop an integrative solution** that includes some of the needs of all parties.
5. **Reach a final agreement** that all parties can *accept* (not necessarily love – but accept and move forward).

NOTES

THE SILVER BULLET



Getting invested in solving the other person’s problem is a kind, generous and moral thing to do. It is also the best way to get your own problem solved.

Most people will be so wrapped up in their own emotions and in getting their own needs met that they will not be able to focus on your concerns.

Once you demonstrate that you are committed to solving their problem too – by listening, telling them, and taking action – they will be able to relax enough to hear your concerns and grateful enough to start addressing them.

It isn’t easy to do, and it takes some practice, but I assure you that it works!

<p><u>NOTES</u></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public Engagement – Take a Poll

Do you worry about public engagement / meetings becoming contentious?


_____ Yes, I see it happening more and more

_____ I haven't seen it a lot, but I worry it will happen

_____ No, I really don't see or expect it to happen

Public Engagement

The key to success when facing a difficult public meeting is planning and preparation!



Resources are available at the OCDR website:
mn.gov/admin/government/ocdr/public-engagement/

Keys to better public engagement on difficult issues

- ✓ What is the reason for the meeting? Know your purpose and design the meeting accordingly.
- ✓ Relationship building first and at the center
- ✓ Design to promote problem solving rather than position demanding
- ✓ Plan, plan, plan. Have a plan to deal with surprises and strong emotion (difficult behavior)
- ✓ Set expectations that all participants will learn and change their minds and presume positive intent
- ✓ 4C's of trust: caring, competence, consistency and communication
- ✓ Create space and time to acknowledge missteps, anger, fear, and difference

<p><u>NOTES</u></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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SUMMARY

BRIDGING DIVIDES

SUMMARY

- ✓ Even when people are in disagreement, there are often underlying values that are agreed upon (public service, etc.)
- ✓ Understand that conflict is about the perception of incompatible needs
- ✓ Cultivate a problem solving mindset of being joint problem solvers working together to develop solutions that meet the most important needs of everyone involved

BRIDGING DIVIDES

SUMMARY

- ✓ Start from accepting that the other person's story is as true and valid for them as yours is for you
- ✓ Work to Understand (not necessarily agree with)
- ✓ To solve a problem you must know what the interests are of everyone involved
- ✓ To identify the interests you need to develop your listening skills

BRIDGING DIVIDES

SUMMARY

- ✓ People just want to be heard. Remember to:
Listen to **LEARN**, not to **RESPOND**
- ✓ Commit to really listening hard by listening beyond the words to *the heart of the message*. Say: **'Tell Me More'**
- ✓ When you do speak, talk more about yourself – your feelings, needs, and part – than the other person

BRIDGING DIVIDES

SUMMARY

- ✓ Use reframing techniques to change toxic or positional statements into statements that others can respond to productively.
- ✓ Follow the 5-step model for working through really difficult issues.

Nothing in this handbook is easy, but it all works! Just like anything else in life, practice makes perfect.

Practice by trying to identify the shared values, diverse perspectives, underlying needs, emotions, identity issues, reframes and **OPTIONS** of conflicts you are not involved in such as ones you see on Television or on the bus, political issues, or conflicts between friends or colleagues. Practice on your own conflicts by first trying to identify these aspects of your conflict before discussing it with your conflict partner.

And remember: **GET AS INVESTED IN SOLVING THEIR PROBLEM AS YOU ARE IN YOUR OWN.**

NOTES

RECOMMENDED READINGS / CONTACT INFO

BRIDGING DIVIDES

RECOMMENDED READING

- **CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS** by Patterson and others
- **DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS** by Stone, Patton and Heen
- **GETTING TO YES** by Ury, Fisher and Patton
- **NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION** by Marshall Rosenberg

Visit the OCDR website: <https://mn.gov/admin/ocdr>

**THANK
YOU**



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NOTES

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



Increasing Level of Public Impact

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fact sheets ■ Web sites ■ Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public comment ■ Focus groups ■ Surveys ■ Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Workshops ■ Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen advisory committees ■ Consensus-building ■ Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decision

Dealing with Deeply Held Concerns and other Challenges to Public Engagement Processes

Public Engagement Challenges

Differences of opinion about land use plans, budgets, employee pensions, public safety, sustainability, transportation options, affordable housing and other topics can trigger strong concerns and emotions held by community residents and groups. At times, local agencies and officials may themselves be the main topic of heated public discussions.

Public engagement processes are often forums for a broad spectrum of input. In some cases, public engagement participants will have very strongly held views about:

- The topics to be discussed;
- The local (or regional) agency and officials involved; and/or
- The public engagement process itself.

Such deeply held concerns can present challenges to a local agency sponsoring or organizing a public engagement process. It is important to make sure that these concerns are addressed effectively, to ensure the opportunity for all perspectives to be heard.

Designing and facilitating a discussion among people who have significantly different perspectives and deep feelings about an issue is both a skill and an art. The following ideas can help in designing and preparing for public engagement processes that are effective, responsive and civil - even when participants hold very strong views. Of course, local and regional agency public engagement plans and responses will be contingent on the time, staff and financial resources available.

Contents

Public Engagement Challenges

Know Your Likely Participants

Plan, Prepare and Provide Information

Design an Appropriate Process

Transparency in Public Engagement

Negative, Emotional or Challenging Comments

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

Know Your Likely Participants

As part of the public engagement planning process, try to anticipate and understand:

- Participants' likely concerns and interests.
- Gaps in the information they are likely to have about the topic of discussion.

It is helpful to know your public engagement participants and their views. Organized stakeholders and interest groups tend to hold strong views, while members of the public may have more varied opinions. To better understand the viewpoints of your audience:

- Talk with colleagues at other local and regional agencies to better understand what challenges and strong public sentiments surfaced during their public engagement activities. Ask which engagement-related approaches worked and which did not.
- Consider the range of goals participants have in attending the public engagement meeting. Some participants will welcome opportunities for dialogue and deliberation with their neighbors. Others may primarily want the opportunity to: 1) ask questions; 2) make their views known; and/or 3) raise objections to the public engagement or planning process itself.

Plan, Prepare and Provide Information

Meetings that involve individuals and groups with very different and deeply held perspectives on the issues, on the role of government, and on public engagement itself, require careful planning. It is helpful to:

- Meet with groups and organizations likely to have strongly held views early in the design process. This may help to better understand views and concerns and to solicit input on process design that will enable all participants to be heard. In some cases, forming a public engagement advisory committee may be helpful.
- Plan and hold selected public engagement activities in partnership with groups and organizations that have earned the community's respect.
- Demonstrate a commitment to seeking public views by offering opportunities for early input into the matters under consideration.
- Try to ensure that participants adequately reflect the diverse population and viewpoints of the affected community.

- Be especially clear in all communications about public engagement meeting purposes and processes, as well as about when, how and by whom final decisions will be made.
- If possible, provide appropriate background information to participants before and during the meeting to help prepare for informed participation.
- Identify and use impartial meeting facilitators and leaders who will not have, or be perceived as having, a bias. This may encourage greater trust in the process and broader participation.
- When using speakers to introduce issues and provide perspectives on topics present a broad spectrum of views.
- Prepare staff and facilitators to be comfortable with strongly expressed opinions and confrontational behavior. Provide staff and facilitators with possible options and responses if participants challenge meeting ground rules, processes and/or content. Facilitators should be courteous even if challenged and flexible as circumstances require.
- If concerns arise about potential safety and security issues at a meeting, staff and facilitators should know who will make decisions about any agenda changes or whether a participant should be asked to leave. Bear in mind that the in some cases, visible presence of law enforcement personnel may discourage full participation or further escalate tensions.

Design an Appropriate Process

Various public engagement process designs support and/or allow opportunities for different kinds of public input. Some meeting design elements are particularly important when issues are significantly controversial and contested. Consider the following ideas:

- Design processes that attempt to meet the reasonable participation needs of those likely to attend. This may include: agendas that include time for questions and answers, individual comments, small group discussion and collective discussions. However, be very realistic about the time you need if you pursue such multi-faceted approaches. Sometimes separate and/or serial public engagement activities may be called for. In some cases, an earlier meeting that allows for more individual comments, questions and answers, can be followed by a meeting (or meetings) with opportunities for more collective scenario discussions and planning.
- If your goal is to try to find common ground across very deeply held and strongly felt differences, the process or processes you choose must be designed for that purpose. Typically, this will require: buy-in from key stakeholders about the process and its purpose; well thought out and accepted ground rules; competent and trusted facilitation; attention to relationship building among participants; and multiple meetings with opportunities for frank dialogue and deliberation. It is also important to include participants who reflect the views of the greater community.

- Frame and publicize the *purpose* of the public engagement meeting/activity in a way that clarifies your goals, the information you plan to share, and the sort of public knowledge you are seeking.
- Allow enough time in the agenda to explain what will be accomplished during the current meeting, and to present an overview of the decision-making process, individual roles and responsibilities and how public input will be incorporated.
- Present issues and scenarios to be discussed in ways that acknowledge underlying policy history and assumptions.
- Be careful of presenting a closed set of predetermined scenarios or choices to participants. It is generally best, to give participants the opportunity to identify other options or to express a “none of the above” preference. If the scenarios presented are the result of previous public engagement efforts, make that clear.
- Provide sources and background information when presenting data and other information to the public so people can verify it for themselves.
- At times, it can be useful to start with a less controversial topic or a more do-able piece of work and then move into more difficult and controversial issues. This may increase the public’s confidence in the process and commitment to address the larger issues.
- Consider including options for online input and discussion in the overall public engagement strategy. This allows additional choices for participation and may help secure a broader range of perspectives from the community.
- Create participant worksheets that allow meeting attendees to offer more detailed individual comments and ideas.
- If the agenda includes an opportunity for public comment and a large number of participants are expected, consider limiting the comment time allowed for each individual so that all can be heard. In some cases, key questions may be identified in small groups and then asked in the larger group.
- Determine how any collected comments, discussion elements or recommendations will be recorded and documented and where and when they will be available.

Transparency in Public Engagement

At the public engagement meeting be clear about ground rules and each activity's purpose. Maintain a respectful, impartial and firm tone and manner. Stay flexible to meet unexpected challenges. Consider the following ideas:

- Early in the meeting, briefly describe the overall agency decision-making process, the various opportunities for public input, the goal of the meeting and how the input will be used. This should include the roles and responsibilities for ultimate decision-making, implementation and/or action by the local or regional agencies involved.
- Explain, as appropriate, the roles of others at the meeting including: local or other public officials or agency staff, presenters, facilitators, media, etc.
- Describe the meeting ground rules and the values and behaviors they are intended to promote (such as respect and fairness). Ask participants to agree to observe the ground rules. If someone objects or refuses to agree, ask if the rest of the group agrees. If there is substantial objection or confusion, further discussion may be required. If one or two people out of a large group raise concerns, these should also be addressed. However, if no closure can be achieved in a few minutes, state that the ground rules accepted by most meeting attendees will be in effect and all are asked to follow them. It will then be the meeting organizers' responsibility to determine which, if any, ground rule "violations" that occur need to be identified; this may result in someone being asked to leave.
- If participants will be asked to sign in or identify themselves before speaking, explain the purpose this serves for both speakers and listeners.
- For question or comment periods, indicate whether participants will be called upon directly or asked to submit question/comment cards. Some individuals may object to the use of comment cards, believing their contributions will not be as effective if they are grouped with others' or expressed by someone other than themselves.
- Acknowledge that there are likely to be disagreements. Encourage participants to practice active listening to ensure that people feel heard. Active listening techniques include repeating what one has heard, asking for clarification, avoiding the use of accusatory language and refraining from questioning someone's motives or integrity.

Negative, Emotional or Challenging Comments

Some discussions may become loud and passionate. Rude or insulting comments may be made. Some participants may challenge the public engagement process or the overarching decision making process of the local agency. It is important to listen carefully, use good judgment and respond specifically to what is being said. For example:

- Encourage and practice active listening. Be respectful. Do not respond in kind to derogatory or insulting comments.
- Identify and respond to the substance of the question or comment rather than to its tone (assuming the question or comment is relevant to the topic).
- As appropriate, ask the person making a challenging comment to explain their point more fully. If a factual assertion is made, ask for the source of their information. Encourage everyone to draw connections between their comments and the policy issues at hand.
- If some of the participants object to moving from a large group format to small group discussions, you may suggest that those who wish to do so should move to the small group discussions. A facilitator or staff member can work with those remaining to construct a process that will meet their needs.
- Intervene if personal verbal attacks are made by one participant to another. Refer back to the ground rules and ask that such comments not be made or repeated. If a meeting leader or facilitator is individually verbally attacked, they should not respond in kind but should refer to the ground rules. Ask the speaker to reframe the question or comment in a way that focuses on the policy issues at hand.
- Suggest a short break and, as appropriate, speak to an individual about his or her inappropriate language or interactions with others.
- Be aware that people who do not feel heard are likely to speak loudest. Some individuals also use more direct or emotional styles of verbal and nonverbal expression than others.
- To the degree that's realistic, try to steer the conversation away from terms that may mean very different things to different people, such as "sustainability," "liberty," "property rights" or "economic justice."

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

While rare, if one or more participants' behavior become continually and personally insulting or disruptive, it is important to acknowledge and address it appropriately. If this behavior is not addressed, the meeting may deteriorate and the chances of accomplishing the meeting's purpose will decrease. Clearly establish in advance which individuals are responsible for taking such action, and communicate this to meeting sponsors, leaders and facilitators.

If insults, disruptive behavior, or challenges to the meeting continue to occur, consider the following ideas:

- Review and enforce the meeting ground rules.
- Have the meeting facilitator maintain control of the microphone(s).
- In some cases, ask the group whether they wish the meeting to continue as planned or move to another format or process. However, this can be difficult and usually unwise in an already polarized or increasingly out-of-control meeting.
- If a "back-up" engagement process has been planned, move to it if appropriate and explain to participants what will happen next.
- If some participants continue to shout, talk over others, or disrupt the meeting:
 - Indicate that they will be asked to leave if the disorderly behavior continues; and take that step if called for; and/or
 - Conclude the meeting.

About the Institute for Local Government

This tipsheet is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to provide good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association.

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