

# MANAGING CONFLICT

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A GUIDE FOR WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS



RECYCLED PAPER



# UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT.

## WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. It can also originate from past rivalries and

personality differences. Other causes of conflict include trying to negotiate before the timing is right or before needed information is available.

Conflict is not always negative. In fact, it can be healthy when effectively managed. Healthy conflict can lead to...

- ◆ Growth and innovation
- ◆ New ways of thinking
- ◆ Additional management options

If the conflict is understood, it can be effectively managed by reaching a consensus that meets both the individual's and society's needs. This results in mutual benefits and strengthens the relationship. The goal is for all to “win” by having at least some of their needs met.

## THE INGREDIENTS OF CONFLICT.

**Needs** — Needs are things that are essential to our well-being. Conflicts arise when we ignore others' needs, our own needs or the group's needs. Be careful not to confuse needs with desires (things we would like, but are not essential).

**Perceptions** — People interpret reality differently. They perceive differences in the severity, causes and consequences of problems. Misperceptions or differing perceptions may come from: self-perceptions, others' perceptions, differing perceptions of situations and perceptions of threat.

**Power** — How people define and use power is an important influence on the number and types of conflicts that occur. This also influences how conflict is managed. Conflicts can arise when people try to make others change their actions or to gain an unfair advantage.

**Values** — Values are beliefs or principles we consider to be very important. Serious conflicts arise when people hold incompatible values or when values are not clear. Conflicts also arise when one party refuses to accept the fact that the other party holds something as a value rather than a preference.

**Feelings and emotions** — Many people let their feelings and emotions become a major influence over how they deal with conflict. Conflicts can also occur because people ignore their own or others' feelings and emotions. Other conflicts occur when feelings and emotions differ over a particular issue.

## HOW PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CONFLICTS DIFFER.

Most of us have experience with conflict management and negotiation in private disputes (with a salesman, among family members or with your employer).

Public conflicts, like those that can occur during watershed management efforts and other environmental issues often are rooted in trying to balance environmental protection and economic growth and jobs. Keep in mind, however, that effective watershed management can result in both economic and environmental benefits. Some complicating factors include:

### *Distribution of costs and benefits.*

Those who benefit may not be the same as those who pay the costs.

*Perceptions of problems.* People tend to blame others for causing the problem.

*Speed of clean-up or other actions.*

Some will want changes to take place more quickly than others.

# MANAGING CONFLICT.

There are five steps to managing conflict. These steps are:

- ◆ Analyze the conflict
- ◆ Determine management strategy
- ◆ Pre-negotiation
- ◆ Negotiation
- ◆ Post-negotiation

## STEP

1

### ANALYZE THE CONFLICT.

The first step in managing conflict is to analyze the nature and type of conflict. To do this, you'll find it helpful to ask questions (see list).

Answers may come from your own experience, your partners or local media coverage. You may want to actually interview some of the groups involved. Additional information regarding analyzing conflicts can be found in the *Guide to Information and Resources*.

## STEP

2

### DETERMINE

### MANAGEMENT STRATEGY.

Once you have a general understanding of the conflict, the groups involved will need to analyze and select the most appropriate strategy. In some cases it may be necessary to have a neutral facilitator to help move the groups toward consensus.

#### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- ◆ Collaboration
- ◆ Compromise
- ◆ Competition
- ◆ Accommodation
- ◆ Avoidance

## CONFLICT ANALYSIS

### EXERCISE:

Think of a controversial issue to analyze. On a separate sheet of paper, answer these questions.

#### *Groups involved*

- Who are the groups involved?
- Who do they represent?
- How are they organized?
- What is their power base?
- Are the groups capable of working together?
- What are the historical relationships among the groups?

#### *Substance*

- How did the conflict arise?
- How are the main and secondary issues described?
- Can negative issues be reframed positively?
- Are the issues negotiable?
- Have positions been taken and, if so, are there common interests?
- What information is available and what other information is needed?
- What values or interests are challenged?

#### *Possible strategies*

- Would consensus serve all interests?
- Are there external constraints or other influences that must be accommodated?
- What are the past experiences (if any) of the groups working together?
- What is the timeline for a decision?
- How will the public and the media be involved and informed?
- Will an outside negotiator be needed?

**Collaboration** — This results from a high concern for your group's own interests, matched with a high concern for the interests of other partners. The outcome is "win/win." This strategy is generally used when concerns for others are important. It is also generally the best strategy when society's interest is at stake. This approach helps build commitment and reduce bad feelings. The drawbacks are that it

## MANAGING CONFLICT (CONTINUED).

takes time and energy. In addition, some partners may take advantage of the others' trust and openness. Generally regarded as the best approach for managing conflict, the objective of collaboration is to reach consensus. (See the *Building Local Partnerships* guide for more information about consensus.)

**Compromise** — This strategy results from a high concern for your group's own interests along with a moderate concern for the interests of other partners. The outcome is “win some/lose some.” This strategy is generally used to achieve temporary solutions, to avoid destructive power struggles or when time pressures exist. One drawback is that partners can lose sight of important values and long-term objectives. This approach can also distract the partners from the merits of an issue and create a cynical climate.

**Competition** — This strategy results from a high concern for your group's own interests with less concern for others. The outcome is “win/lose.” This strategy includes most attempts at bargaining. It is generally used when basic rights are at stake or to set a precedent. However, it can cause the conflict to escalate and losers may try to retaliate.

**Accommodation** — This results from a low concern for your group's own interests combined with a high concern for the interests of other partners. The outcome is “lose/win.” This strategy is generally used when the issue is more important to others than to you. It is a “goodwill gesture.” It is also appropriate when you recognize that you are wrong. The drawbacks are that your own ideas and concerns don't get attention. You may also lose credibility and future influence.

**Avoidance** — This results from a low concern for your group's own interests coupled with a low concern for the interests of others. The outcome is “lose/lose.” This strategy is generally used when the issue is trivial or other issues are more pressing. It is also used when confrontation has a high potential for damage or more information is needed. The drawbacks are that important decisions may be made by default.

### STEP 3

#### PRE-NEGOTIATION.

To set the stage for effective negotiation, the groundwork must be laid. The following should occur prior to negotiation.

**Initiation** — One partner raises the possibility of negotiation and begins the process. If no one is willing to approach the others to encourage them to reach an agreement, a trusted outsider could be brought in as a facilitator

**Assessment** — Conditions must be right for negotiation to be successful. Key players must be identified and invited. Each side must be willing to collaborate with the others. Reasonable deadlines and sufficient resources to support the effort must exist. Spokespersons for each group must be identified and involved. Parties need to determine which issues are negotiable and which are not.

**Ground rules and agenda** — The groups must agree on ground rules for communication, negotiation and decision making. They should agree on the objectives of the

negotiation process. An agenda of issues to be covered needs to be developed.

**Organization** — Meeting logistics must be established, including agreed upon times and places. People must be contacted and encouraged to attend. Minutes must be taken so that information can be distributed before and after meetings.

**Joint fact-finding** — The groups must agree on what information is relevant to the conflict. This should include what is known and not known about social and technical issues. Agreement is also needed on methods for generating answers to questions.

## STEP 4

### NEGOTIATION.

For more in-depth information about negotiation skills, see page 6.

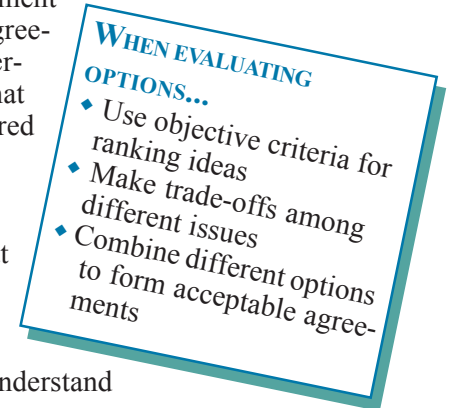
**Interests** — When negotiating be sure to openly discuss interests, rather than stated positions. Interests include the reasons, needs, concerns and motivations underlying positions. Satisfaction of interests should be the common goal.

**Options** — To resolve conflicts, concentrate on inventing options for satisfying interests. Do not judge ideas or favor any of the options suggested. Encourage creativity, not commitment.

**Evaluation** — Only after the partners have finished listing options, should the options be discussed. Determine together which ideas are best for satisfying various interests.

**Written agreement** — Document areas of agreement and disagreement to ensure common understanding. This helps ensure that agreements can be remembered and communicated clearly.

**Commitment** — Every partner must be confident that the others will carry out their parts of the agreement. Discuss and agree upon methods to ensure partners understand and honor their commitments.



## STEP 5

### POST-NEGOTIATION.

Once negotiation is complete, the group will need to implement the decisions made. Some key steps include:

**Ratification** — The partners must get support for the agreement from organizations that have a role to play in the agreement. These organizations should be partners and should have been involved in the previous steps. Each organization will need to follow its own procedures to review and adopt the agreement.

**Implementation** — You and your partners' jobs are not done when you've reached agreement. Communication and collaboration should continue as the agreement is carried out. The partnership will need to have a plan to monitor progress, document success, resolve problems, renegotiate terms and celebrate success.

# NEGOTIATION SKILLS.

Negotiation is an important skill for coming to an agreement when conflicts develop at home, at work and when dealing with issues like those related to watershed management. When negotiating . . .

## SEPARATE PEOPLE FROM THE PROBLEM.

When negotiating, remember you're dealing with people who have their own unique needs, emotions and perceptions.

Some conflicts are based on differences in thinking and perceptions. These conflicts may exist mainly in peoples' minds. It helps for each party to put themselves into the other's shoes so they can understand each other's point of view.

Identify and openly discuss differences in perceptions, being careful not to place blame. In addition, recognize and understand the other side's emotions as well as your own.

## FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS.

Focusing on interests, rather than positions, makes it possible to come up with better agreements. Even when people stand on opposite positions, they usually have a few shared interests.

It takes time and effort to identify interests. Groups may not even be clear about their own interests. It helps to write down each group's interests as they are discovered. It helps to ask why others take the positions or make the decisions they do. Partners will have multiple interests.

Interests involving important human needs (such as security, economic well-being, a sense of belonging, recognition and control over one's life) are difficult to negotiate.

## DEVELOP OPTIONAL SOLUTIONS.

When developing optional solutions that meet the interests of all sides, try to meet as many of each side's interests as possible. Start by inviting all sides to brainstorm ideas (before reaching a decision). Brainstorming is discussed in the *Leading and Communicating* guide.

Some obstacles to developing innovative options are:

- ◆ Judging and rejecting prematurely
- ◆ Searching for a single best answer
- ◆ Putting limits on scope or vision
- ◆ Considering only your own interests

To overcome these obstacles, view the situation through the eyes of different partners. Focus on shared interests to make the process smoother for all involved. Look for meaningful opportunities, not simple solutions.

## DEVELOPING OBJECTIVE CRITERIA.

When developing criteria for selecting or combining possible alternatives, revisit the conflicting interests. These can't be ignored or "wished" away. Instead discuss them as you begin developing criteria for judging alternatives. Also keep in mind principles such as fairness, efficiency and scientific merit.

Strive for criteria that are legitimate, practical and unbiased. You may also find it helps to explore the criteria used in making past decisions and discuss criteria with your partners or outside experts.

### INTEREST VS. POSITION

People often confuse interests with positions. An interest may be reducing litter in roadside ditches. There are many possible ways of addressing this interest. One might be the position of mandatory recycling. Another position might be a deposit on bottles and cans. Still another could be organizing a clean-up day.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

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To start down the road toward an effective local watershed partnership, you may want to read some of these other guides from the Conservation Technology Information Center by calling 765-494-9555. A \$2.00 fee is charged to cover postage and handling.

*Getting to Know Your Watershed*  
*Building Local Partnerships*  
*Leading & Communicating*  
*Putting Together a Watershed Plan*  
*Reflecting on Lakes*  
*Groundwater & Surface Water: Understanding the Interaction*  
*Guide to Information and Resources.*  
*Nonpoint Source Water Quality Contacts.*

The author acknowledges the following sources of information that were used in developing this guide. You may also find these publications helpful. They should be available through your local bookstore.

*Breaking the Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes.*  
Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank, 1987, New York, NY: Basic Books.  
*Creating the High Performance Team.*  
Steve Buchholz and Thomas Roth, 1987, New York, NY: Wiley.  
*The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution: Preserving Relationship at Work, at Home, and in the Community.*  
Dudley Weeks, 1992, New York, NY: St. Martins Press.  
*Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In.*  
Robert Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, 1991, New York, NY: Penguin Books.  
*Managing Public Disputes: A Practical Guide to Handling Conflict and Reaching Agreements.*  
Susan L. Carpenter and W.J.D. Kennedy, 1988, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.  
*The Planner as Dispute Resolver: Concepts and Teaching Materials.*  
A. Bruce Dotson, David Godschalk, and Jerome Kaufman, 1989, Washington, DC: National Institute for Dispute Resolution.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE...

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This guide is one of a series for people who want to organize a local partnership to protect their watershed. The guides will not solve all your problems. They were designed to provide guidance for going through the process of building a voluntary partnership, developing a watershed management plan and implementing that plan. Because the characteristics of each watershed are unique; you may wish to select and use the portions of this guide that are applicable to your particular situation.

Although the series is written for watershed-based planning areas, the ideas and process can be used for developing other types of plans (such as wildlife areas) to match the concerns of the partnership. Regardless of the area, remember a long-term, integrated perspective — based on a systematic, scientific assessment — can be used to address more than one concern at a time.

## SPECIAL THANKS...

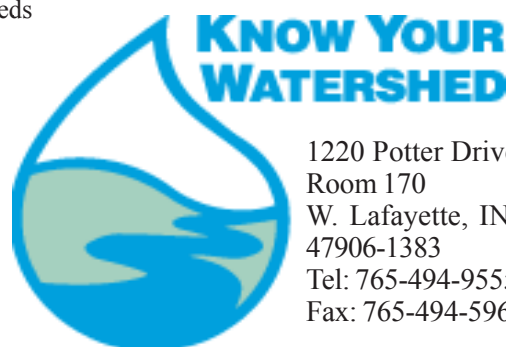
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