CONFLICT IDENTIFICATION & RESOLUTION

PURPOSES & BENEFITS

These tools help a group to address and resolve conflict by using conflict positively and constructively.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The collaborative group can use this tool to:
- Identify and understand common points of conflict within a group, including people, procedures and content, linking them to the underlying issue(s), what to do, and how to facilitate resolution.
- Process ideas for conflict resolution.
- Consider how to do their best.

IDEAS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND SITUATIONS

Below are some examples of common point of conflict within a group, including people, procedures and content. The table below outlines these examples, linking them to the underlying issue(s), what to do, and how to facilitate resolution.

Problem	Issue(s)	What To Do	Facilitate By
People Problems			
Intense anger	Person needs to express deep emotion	Set/know guidelines on angry behavior; use breaks and/or caucuses	Keep cool; keep voice low and gentle but assertive
Meeting dominator	They feel they have more information than others; need to be heard but feel they aren't	Acknowledge their information contribution by restating it; do not recognize repetitive talkers	Structure so more people can talk; use time limits; be assertive
Group members talking over or past one another	People not listening or having different priorities	Restate what people have said or have others do so	Structure so that all participants can speak; acknowledge that their messages have been heard
Low morale	No measurable goals	Have group members list their past successes; focus on small, achievable steps	Set realistic goals; develop concrete, next steps plans
Procedural Problems			
Group members talking about many issues at once	Unclear goals and/or process for achieving goals	Restate goals; ask group to focus on one goal only; break it down into components, focusing on one component at a time	Set up a clear step-by-step approach to achieve goal
Group not able to reach a decision	No clear end-in-mind; no one is summarizing	Summarize discussion; ask for goal resolution; take a break; postpone decision making; make the decision smaller	Assign a summarizer role; establish clear decision making procedures or steps
Substantive or Content Problems			
Group members are stuck on a position	Personal commitment to a proposal; lack of perceived options	Brainstorm together; develop a vision or review the group's vision; suggest options	Encourage empathy; find what group members are will to do to make progress
Dispute over values	Diverse views that seem irreconcilable	Agree to disagree; establish or review group's guiding principles	Identify a collective vision and values and then work backwards toward lower-level agreements

PROCESS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict in a collaborative group is inevitable. Addressing conflict during the collaborative group meeting, rather than complaining about it elsewhere, is the only way to create an opportunity for resolution.

Having conflict is not as important as determining how to address conflict in terms of the group's long term success. Having a process in place to address conflict before it occurs is ideal in order to effectively manage group conflict. Here are some conflict resolution process ideas:

- **Review the goal, vision or end-in-mind**. Ask, "If we want to achieve this goal/vision/end-in-mind, what must we do about this conflict?" Determine the issue(s) the group must resolve in order to do its work.
- **Determine a process facilitator**
- **Separate conflict from "right" and "wrong"**
- **Ensure everyone is heard**
- **Don't burn bridges.** Keep the process goal that group members will continue to work together. Creating rituals for healing or positive forward movement will help the group to make the transition more smoothly. Humor is also another important tool!

HOW TO DO YOUR BEST

Doing our best involves:
- Working for a "Win/Win" instead of a "Win/Lose." Avoid focusing on the negative or the problem, but rather to work toward identifying assets and a solution. Focusing on a problem reduces energy, results in blaming, and leads others to see their resources as limited.
- Develop a "preferred future." Ask what it would look like "If we got it right."
- Encourage brainstorming, which includes such guidelines as: don't judge ideas now—save discussion of ideas for later, the more ideas the better, and building on others' ideas.
- Bring new resources to the table, including encouragement of those at the table to review their personal resources.
- As a first step, explore other's opinions and ideas.

Assumptions and Conflict
- We tend to make assumptions about conflict, most often that conflict is bad and should be avoided. However, while some might view conflict as a contest to win and others something to avoid, conflict can be used to explore other points of view and to discover opportunities for progress.
- We create barriers to positive outcomes by making assumptions, by taking things personally, and by gossiping about our assumptions. We perpetuate this by not asking for clarification, defending our assumptions, and trying to make someone else wrong based on our assumptions. To avoid making assumptions, it is important to gather more facts about the situation and about our own beliefs. It is also important to gain knowledge about the facts, about how others perceive the situation, and about your own beliefs.

Keeping Conflict Positive
Keeping conflict positive involves:
- Trying not to become angry. Don't let your anger control you, but instead control your anger.
- Seeking to "understand" before you are "understood"
- Focusing on staying calm
- Remembering the Four Agreements (for details, see the "Guiding Principles Examples" document in the same section of the toolkit as this document)
- Take a "time out"
- Slowly count to ten
- Take a short walk

Calming an Angry Person
To calm an angry person you can:
- Listen to them
- Stop talking and give them your attention
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Seek additional information
- Don't assume
- Restate your understanding of the problem
- State areas where there is agreement
- Brainstorm a "preferred future"
- Identify all the possible solutions
- Agree on next steps