

Changing Landscapes

Land use planning curriculum for natural resource professionals

- P** rinciples, people, and policies
- L** and planning and pressures
- A** pproaches
- N** atural resource planning tools

L5: Participation with Conflict in Mind



Successful planning of complex natural resource issues requires broad and engaged participation in the decisionmaking process.

Overview

This factsheet discusses participation and its importance in cultivating better dialogue. It recommends approaches to using participatory techniques in conflict resolution to facilitate collaborative dialogue and planning.

Participation

People who are concerned about and use parks, open space, and other public landscapes have diverse attitudes and behaviors. This is especially true in growing ethnic populations, the redevelopment of cities, and the movement of urban people to rural places. Successful planning and management of complex natural resource issues require broad and engaged participation in the decisionmaking process. Participation is a process that brings diverse people together to define critical issues, develop common goals, and exchange information and resources in the spirit of developing action plans that support diverse goals and objectives.

Planning scholars continue to argue that broad citizen participation can generate trust, credibility, and support for carrying out policy and projects. Other benefits of public participation include a better understanding of the likely costs of conflict so that conflict can be dealt with early on in the planning process. Integrating local information and needs in the planning process can lead to strong, productive partnerships.



Broad citizen participation can generate trust, credibility, and support for carrying out policy and projects. (Photo: <http://www.cipast.org>)



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However, increased public participation does not come without its problems. Engaging a large number of participants may lead to conflict that causes people to abandon their commitment to a project. It may increase costs due to the need for conflict resolution skills. There may be a lack of skill in communicating with nontraditional audiences or increased time and costs required for making decisions. With more involvement, there may be concerns about increased workloads and loss of decisionmaking power by organizations and agencies. Increased participation has both benefits and challenges; if done properly, however, the benefits of developing involved and supportive partners can clearly outweigh the challenges.

Cultivating Better Dialogue

In urban areas and rapidly changing rural areas, natural resource planning and management affect broader segments of society than ever before. However, surveys in different regions of the country indicate that people traditionally involved in natural resource decisionmaking are predominately middle-aged or older, well-educated, white males. Chronically underrepresented groups include the elderly, youth, women, various ethnic groups, disabled persons, the less educated, and those who are simply too busy.

Several techniques can be used to identify and involve more people. First, it's important to understand the difference between inviting and empowering. Inviting is placing a notice in the newspaper. Empowering includes such things as providing childcare and transportation, holding meetings at convenient times and locations, distributing information in understandable formats, and actually listening to and considering participants' ideas and viewpoints.

A broad range of people with a stake in the outcome should be included early, often, and throughout the planning process. Stakeholders are people who are interested in, affected by, or important in making decisions. When gathering information and making decisions, it's important to conduct true dialogue with stakeholders rather than just hold question-and-answer sessions. Dialogue is a conversation that involves meaningful speaking and listening. It is developed through two-way communications where people agree to both teach and learn. To do this, people must be able to both share and listen.

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A number of methods can be used to identify stakeholders and gather information from them:

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Groups are convened and asked to work together to draw a map of people and organizations touched by or involved in an issue. Key informants are people who know a lot about a place, thing, or other influential people.
- **Personal interviews**—face-to-face discussions with informants—can shed light on problems and opportunities and provide additional suggestions for participants.
- **Oral histories** cultivate dialogue by allowing people to explain and discuss an issue in their own words.
- **Focus groups** involve facilitated group discussions (usually 10 people or fewer) about a specific topic.
- The **charrette process** is an intense work session with ongoing participation and interaction. In a charrette, a team representing a range of disciplines forms a core group that works with community members through one-on-one and group discussions on such things as environmental mapping; assessing environmental, social, and economic conditions; framing issues; developing strategies for action; and presenting ideas in a public forum to solicit feedback.

The reality is that all of this well-intentioned work can cause or reveal conflict that is often deep seated and historical. Skillful conflict resolution techniques are often required to build useful participation, engage in effective dialogue, and move forward.

Conflict Resolution

In light of varying knowledge, attitudes, and values among stakeholders—not to mention passion and emotion—conflict resolution may be required for useful information and outcomes. Unfortunately, conflict resolution techniques are often overlooked as part of planning and other participatory processes. Conflict resolution involves the following principles:

Listening

Listening must often be defined and addressed during a collaborative conflict resolution process. Listening is not thinking about what you are going to say next, or how much you dislike an idea. Listening is keeping an open mind to the opinions and concerns of others.

Excellent Communications

Informal presentations and dialogue with the group are encouraged, speaking from the heart. It's important to strive for a free flow of accurate and understandable information. Unfortunately, for some, the most powerful strategy is to protect their position by not coming to the table to participate or, once at the table, by withholding information or thoughts.



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An Inclusive, Not Exclusive, Process

Diverse viewpoints are shared and taught through discussion, field trips, presentations, and brainstorming.

Mutual Respect for All

Thoughts and ideas of all participants are respected and assumed valid until proven otherwise.

Focus on Interest, Not Position

The conflict resolution process works only when people are truthful about their interest and are able to explain both what they want and why they want it. What they want (their preferred solution) is known as a position. Why they want it (their underlying concern) is referred to as an interest.

Facilitation

Facilitators can often help groups of people better identify their interests and positions through facilitation. This process helps introduce people and groups to each other and sets rules for listening and communicating. This process can promote the flow of free and accurate information; facilitate discussion on all sides; and make sure common interests are identified, understood, and documented.

The key to conflict resolution is identifying shared interests. The process will fail if people stick to their positions and refuse to share and understand each other's interests. Those shared interests become the central criteria for generating mutual understanding, trust, and respect. Identifying shared interests is a key milestone in successful negotiations and action.

In a simple example, a volunteer organization wants to plant trees, shrubs, and flowers in a park near a school to benefit the neighborhood and the health and enjoyment of children. The local police are concerned about the impact of the new plantings on neighborhood safety, including that of the children. The two positions are 1) the planting of trees, shrubs, and flowers; and 2) protecting public safety. The shared interest is the children.

Once this is recognized, negotiations between the two parties can revolve around their common concern for children. Thus, the first step in building trust and negotiations between diverse people is to identify and acknowledge shared interests through a process of true dialogue.

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Identifying and accepting common interests can be difficult. Participants may not share their perspective or listen to others and may view only their answer as the right answer. Long-lasting, historical relationships can make the conflict resolution process more difficult. Participants, often with the aid of facilitators, need to be encouraged to learn about other people's interest and truly listen to their replies. Something as simple as asking a person a question ("What do you think about that?") or acknowledging a person's concern ("I understand") can change relationships and lead to meaningful discussion.

Participants need to be encouraged to explain their interests. This can be done through a number of different techniques. Taking and sharing pictures of important places and people and the thoughts behind them, sharing different perspectives on problems and opportunities, field trips led by different people, storytelling, and testimonials are all used to help identify mutual interests. Visual techniques such as "vision galleries" and photographs can sometimes help people literally "see" shared interests that would take many words to express.



Field trips led by different people help identify mutual interests in the conflict resolution process.

A Collaborative Approach to Conflict Resolution

A collaborative approach to conflict resolution brings people together to identify the problem, uses common interests to find collaborative solutions, and ultimately develops mutual action rather than just deciding who wins. The process is more complex and time consuming than facilitating group discussion in brief encounters.

Collaborative processes take time, which can be a concern of those who are required to make decisions. Accurate and understandable information is important to help separate fact from personal attitude and values. Compromise and tradeoffs are often needed for successful action. Differences in deeply engrained values that represent the worth that a person or group places on something can be difficult to resolve. Very personal and direct explanation and acknowledgement may help change deeply engrained values.

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Collaborative Conflict Resolution Steps

1. Predeliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Getting Started:</i> Identify and contact stakeholders. Be prepared to use encouragement and persuasion if concerns about power or limitations interfere with willingness to come to the table. • <i>Establishing Ground Rules/Setting Agenda:</i> The group devises rules for communicating, making decisions, sharing information, and organizing. This is a first test of the group's ability to collaborate. • <i>Pursuing Joint Fact Finding:</i> Participants agree on what technical and other information is important to the process, as well as who will gather and present information to the group.
2. Deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Defining the Problem(s):</i> A recognized neutral party can provide an overview, but all participants should define the problem(s) in their own words based on their own perceptions and values. • <i>Educating, Listening, and Developing Criteria:</i> Parties clearly state interests (rather than positions) to each other, or a facilitator uses techniques to identify interests. Interests include reasons, needs, concerns, values, perceptions, and motivations. Shared interests become criteria for negotiating alternatives. • <i>Generating Alternatives:</i> Use brainstorming or other group techniques to invent alternative scenarios without deciding if one is better than another. Creativity is encouraged. • <i>Evaluating Alternatives Based on Interest:</i> Find ways to satisfy shared interests to reach agreement on action and successful negotiations. Discuss how agreed-upon actions might be carried out.
3. Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Implementing Agreed-Upon Alternative(s) and Monitoring:</i> Ratify in writing all actions that have been agreed upon. Clarify possible partnerships. Participants may be called back to review results.

Tips for Working with Elected Officials

Developing good relationships with community officials is essential in putting “green issues” on the agenda of local government. A good strategy for starting the community decisionmaking process is to make friends and allies with elected officials, not to create enemies and conflict.

- Identify an elected official who is likely to support your ideas.
- Include elected officials early in discussions and decisionmaking.
- Understand the legislative facts and financial realities of your proposals and requests.
- Be well informed. Find out the positions of the officials before a hearing. Try to meet with officials personally before a public hearing or discussion.
- Find opportunities throughout the year to communicate the good things about you or your organization, not just at one meeting.
- Include public officials in positive volunteer and press opportunities.
- Be organized when making presentations.
- Relate the positive impact that will result from your request and state any problems it corrects.
- Be respectful, friendly, and concise.
- Listen to questions and comments, and prepare thoughtful responses.
- Provide factsheets and other concise information.
- Ask for, do not demand, officials' views and favorable consideration.
- Use letters to follow up on unresolved issues and thank officials for their support.

Case Study – U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution: Sierra National Forest Dinkey Project Planning Forum

[From the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution

Web site: <http://www.udall.gov/OurPrograms/Institute/ProjectCaseSummary.aspx?Project=1349>]

National forests in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains face continued controversies over the effects of timber harvest on old-growth forests and their wildlife. To determine whether forested landscapes can be managed to maintain essential components and still support timber harvest and other uses, the Sierra National Forest teamed with the Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station in a proposed management study called the Kings River Project. Since its inception, the project was faced with numerous administrative and legal challenges from conservation groups.

With the help of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, the Dinkey Project Planning Forum convened to develop a 154,000-acre project as a subset of the Kings River Project. The planning forum embraced representatives from all stakeholder interests, including forest industry, conservation, wildlife, fire safety, and adjacent landowners. The forum's overall goal was to design and carry out vegetative treatments such as controlled burns, thinning, and watershed restoration. It was hoped that the treatments would restore a healthy forest structure and reduce fire risk to more than 5,000 homes, while supporting ecosystem functions and addressing stakeholder interests for both business and resource conservation.

A broad range of participants helped bring needed expertise and unique problem-solving abilities. Through the process, participants committed to listening, thinking outside the box, and working together to achieve agreement. Through joint fact finding, forum participants were able to agree on fundamental science issues and provide a sound, understandable framework for making decisions.

Credible and independent science and information were keys to the success of the planning forum. Scientific experts were approved by the planning forum and participated in meetings. They were available throughout the process to help with negotiations. Field trips and site visits helped achieve forum success. Facilitation by a third-party neutral entity helped create trust, normalize the conflict, and develop an environment conducive to problem solving. The forum reached agreement on a proposed action and its implementation, which focused on the issues of public and fire fighter safety, managing Pacific Fisher and Spotted Owl habitat, and restoring forest structure and fire resiliency.

The Dinkey Project Planning Forum is one example of a collaborative forest landscape restoration program.



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(Photo: <http://www.udall.gov/OurPrograms/Institute/ProjectCaseSummaries.aspx>)

Relevant Factsheets

P3 – *The Role of the Natural Resource Professional in Planning* – Natural resource professionals engaged in resource planning are often involved in conflict and should understand the basic points of conflict resolution.

P4 – *Developing and Measuring Effective Local Policy* – When assessing policy, it is important to consider the degree of conflict that can result from implementing the policy, whether the policy can stand up to scrutiny, and whether conflict related to it can be overcome.

L4 – *The Power of Collaboration in Community Planning* – A primary objective of conflict resolution is to build collaboration and provide a process for better dialogue and cooperation.

A4 – *Using Science to Substantiate Natural Resource Planning* – Conflict related to natural resource planning can often be resolved using science-based information.

Resources

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