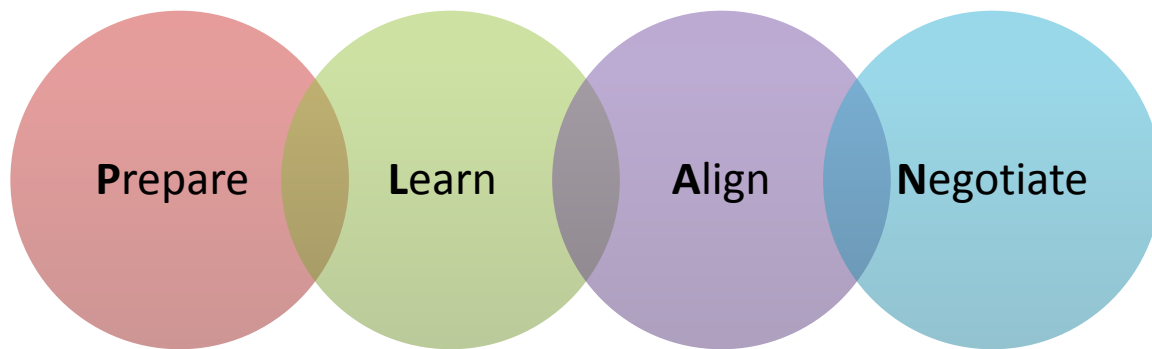


Planning for Conflict

Guidelines to Prepare for and Address Challenges in Creating Healthy Communities

All planning and community building experiences will generate conflict at certain points. Despite common perceptions of widespread apathy, people are generally passionate about changes “in their backyard”, and the processes which can affect the shape and future of their communities.

What’s most essential in addressing such challenges is both expecting that they will occur AND being prepared to engage in them in creative and non-confrontational ways. Here is a four step ‘PLAN’ process to keep in mind before, during and after engaging in any planning process or community meeting.



PREPARE appropriately by:

- structuring a clear agenda
- selecting a strong facilitator or co-facilitators
- clarifying with the purpose of the meeting
- allowing attendees to provide input beforehand
- reviewing what types of conflict might arise
- reflecting on your own attitude and reactions around conflict,
- selecting some techniques to address potential challenges (see below)

LEARN about attendees and listen for potential conflicts by:

- speaking with participants beforehand if possible (or circulating a brief survey)
- clarifying expectations and agreements by listing outcomes from the meeting itself (and the overall process) as well as group agreements about behavior
- surfacing dissenting opinions but not letting them become the focus of the meeting

ALIGN with others by:

- planning a strategy to keep focused on the agenda
- developing an approach (and roles) for addressing and redirecting conflicts

NEGOTIATE with those who might raise concerns or surface conflicts by:

- structuring a process for people to share their ideas one-by-one
- creating small groups or pairs to discuss particular concerns
- legitimizing any concerns and deferring them to another meeting
- having the entire group stop to write down concerns or vote on next steps.

Here are some talking points and strategies that you can bring to a meeting to stem or reduce conflict that might arise:

- *If someone begins talking out of turn, or interrupting someone who is talking:* “We have an agreement that people talk one at a time and are recognized by the facilitator before speaking. If you’d like to say something, we’re happy to have you share this during your turn.” OR “Let’s break into pairs and answer the question we’re currently working with. Write down your ideas and we’ll come back to the large group to hear them in about 10 minutes.”
- *If someone will not stop talking:* “I’m really sorry to interrupt, but in order to have everyone participate and get all of the ideas out that we need, I’ll have to ask you to stop at this point” OR “I’d like to hear more about what you are saying, but we need to let others speak at this point. Let’s talk more about your ideas after the meeting.”
- *If they continue talking:* “We’re all here because we want to create a better future for our communities...and I believe you’re interested in this as well. Part of that is listening to each other, and I’d like to invite you to do that now” OR Have the group engage in individual reflection, writing their ideas down on index cards.
- *If people try to take over the meeting and start pushing their own agenda:* “I’m sorry, but we’ve already decided on facilitators for this meeting. If you’d like to have a meeting about the topics that you are discussing, you are welcome to use another part of the room and people who would like to discuss these issues with you can join you there.” OR “We agreed on an agenda and asked people beforehand to provide their input...there will be an opportunity for you to share your ideas, but we need to stay focused on our agenda.”
- *If someone starts yelling or chanting—directed at someone, or just to interrupt the meeting process:* Let them either finish yelling or chanting and ask “Are you done?” OR Talk with others at the meeting, encouraging them to focus on what it is you are discussing (and ignore those chanting or yelling). You can also ask those people to leave if they wouldn’t like to engage productively in your meeting and/or you can break up the group into smaller groups or take a break for a few minutes to re-group.

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