

Leadership Skills

MODULE 3: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

As a leader in your community, how you manage conflict plays a very important role in how successful you will be in gaining the respect of others.

Our experiences in life have shaped how we currently experience and interpret conflict. Does experiencing conflict invigorate you or do you 'shut down' and avoid situations of conflict?

To develop a healthy conflict management style, we must first acknowledge how we relate to conflict.

Activity 1: Understanding Conflict

1. Write what conflict means to you, or how it happens to you. Think of your comparison to conflict and write it below. Be prepared to share your response.

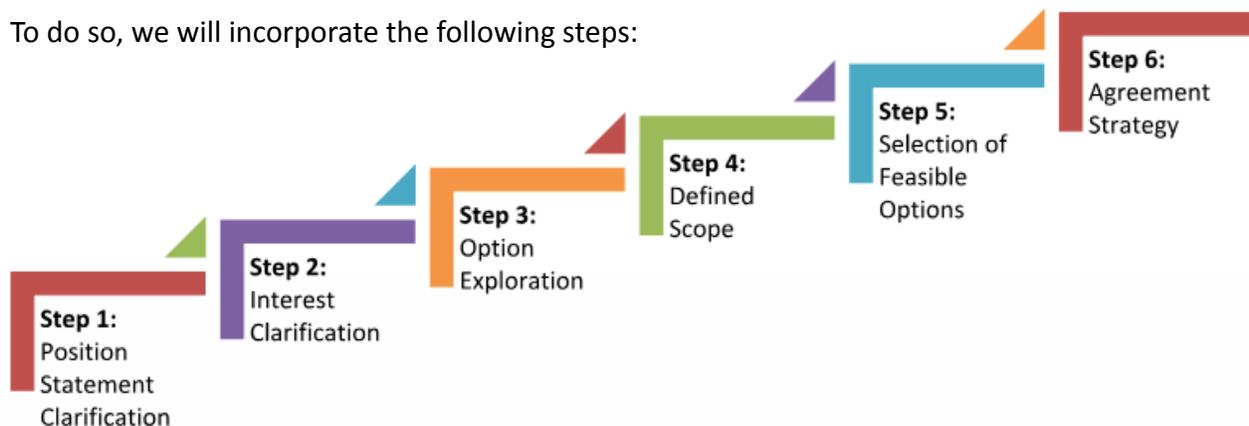
Interpersonal conflict can occur when the concerns of two or more people appear to be incompatible.

Many conflict management models can support you to better address and work through conflict. For this workshop, we will be focusing on distinguishing an 'interest' from a 'position.' To do this, you should have good listening skills and encourage yourself to stay curious and avoid becoming defensive to fully understand the opposing views expressed.

Before we begin, consider a potential conflict that may arise between community members that you may need to navigate as a political leader. Describe this scenario below:

We are going to explore a method often used during meditation when the views of two opposing parties are willing to share their differing views or conflict with the intention of resolving the conflict peacefully and productively.

To do so, we will incorporate the following steps:



Step 1: Position Statement Clarification

WHAT EACH PERSON WANTS

To best understand the root cause of the issue, we need to tune our ears to the position expressed by each party involved in the conflict. A position often presents itself as a solution such as “I don’t want a highway built through that land.” Positions are often surface statements about where a person or organization stands, and rarely provide insight into underlying motivations, values or incentives. Once you feel that you fully understand what each conflicting party wants, you can move to the next step to explore interests.

Step 2: Interest Clarification

WHY EACH PERSON WANTS IT

Through some skillful active listening, the reason behind the position may be shared—which is known as the ‘interest’ behind the ‘position’ in a conflict situation. For example, an interest behind not wanting a highway built could be that the land where the highway is planned is sacred land to the surrounding community. Interest statements are a party’s underlying reasons, values or motivations. Interests explain why someone takes a certain position.

Step 3: Option Exploration

Once the interests have been identified, it’s worthwhile to explore possible options that could meet the needs of each party’s interests. Such as, a highway may be built on another section of non-sacred land, or the highway is raised over the sacred land using a causeway, or possibly the items on the sacred land are relocated to an ideal location within the community. This is the stage where brainstorming occurs, and creative ideas and suggestions are offered. No value is placed on any of the options at this stage, and it’s helpful to have many options that could meet the needs of all parties.

Step 4: Defined Scope

In this stage, criteria are listed that is required to consider when choosing a viable option. For example, time and money need to be considered in terms of what is available and reasonable.

Step 5: Selection of Feasible Options

Using the scope outlined in Step 4, you can now review all of the possible options outlined in Step 3 and cross off the ones that don’t meet the scope requirements. This will leave options that could be implemented to the benefit of all the parties.

Step 6: Agreement Strategy

If more than one option is available that meets the scope of requirements, there may need to be an agreement on how an option is selected. In most cases, this may result in a vote or having someone with authority making the decision.

Activity 2: Managing Conflict

Now it's your turn to try out each of these steps. Using the Table below, work with a partner and decide on a conflict scenario to explore together. You may choose one of the conflict scenarios that you recorded earlier in this module. You will each represent an opposing position as you work through these steps.

Fill in the table below:

	PARTY #1	PARTY #2
Position What they say they want.		
Interest Why they want it.		
Options Possible solutions that could meet the needs of both the party's interests.		
Scope Resources that will determine if an option is possible or not such as time or money.		
Selection of Feasible Options (what options remain after applying the scope?)		
Agreement Strategy		

By using this 6-step process to conflict management, you are demonstrating skills to work collaboratively with parties in conflict. If you follow these 6-steps, it should lead all parties to a solution that will ultimately meet their underlying needs.

Although this process has been proven to be highly successful with parties in conflict when the relationships are valuable, it will not fit all types of conflict. These 6-steps highlight a collaborative approach to conflict management; however, sometimes collaboration is not the appropriate approach. It's important to consider the most beneficial approach to the conflict based on the situation in itself and the outcome you are seeking.

