Connect the Dots

CONNECTED & DIRECTED

A GUIDE FOR MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

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Lead authors: Rosanne Lubeck
and Stephanie Fuentes

CREATED FOR:

Planners, public agencies, meeting facilitators, and anyone working with community members in a public setting.

WWW.CONNECTTHEDOTS.US

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Our Perspective

Over the past few years, we have been asked more and more about conflict by our clients and our collaborators. How do we manage it? How has COVID affected our social interactions, and is conflict getting worse? Has the political tenor nationally made our local community less connected and more volatile? What we have seen is a mix. Communities are searching for accountability and deeper connections to decision makers, or more direct influence over the decisions themselves, but the benefit is that this brings an active and engaged group of people to the public process. The conflict that arises in these situations can be a powerful tool for transformation, but must be addressed and understood.

We felt the need for a guide for those leading the participatory process to better understand conflict as we seek to elevate the voices of our community members in projects that affect their neighborhoods and their well being. This guide is the result of six months of research and interviews, looking to the worlds of psychology, sociology, and planning to find what we believed were the best resources available for a primer on managing conflict. We had the opportunity to speak to some incredible people in this process, including the staff of the City of Orlando, Impact Services, and Broad Street Ministries, and are grateful for their perspectives.

Our hope is that you find this to be a practical resource you can turn to when planning your public engagement, but also when you need support in the immediate moment. We wanted this to be approachable and concise, but bring something fresh to the table. The team created resources for both developing the process, but also to support the individuals who are doing this work directly and prevent burnout during long engagement processes.

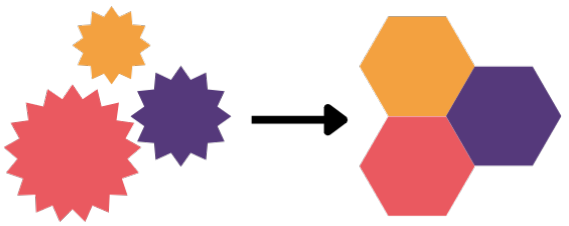
Whether this is your first time working with the public or you are a seasoned professional, there is always something to be learned. We hope you learn as much as we did in the creation of this guide and find it helpful in your work in the participatory process.

Marisa Denker
CEO, Connect the Dots

Rosanne Lubeck
Principal, Connect the Dots

One benefit of public participation is that it brings together people with different experiences and opinions who all care about their community...

But all our different perspectives can lead to conflicts that separate us.



As practitioners, we can find ways to smooth through the conflict and create pathways toward understanding and growth.

Weaving a community fabric that is reflective of everyone, a deeper understanding, and closer ties than ever before.

Introduction

A Guide for Managing Conflict in the Participatory Process

Conflict has an intimidating reputation, particularly in the participatory process. It can frustrate staff, damage relationships within the community, and even mean the end of a project years in the making. But conflict can also be constructive and lead to growth, as the community shares perspectives and builds empathy. As facilitators, we help connect communities during conflict and continue to direct their input towards a common goal or purpose.

Our goal for this guide is to provide realistic, practical tools for facilitators in participatory processes. This is inclusive of actions that can be taken before, during and after interactions and in one-on-one, small and larger group settings. Many of the strategies in this guide are building blocks for creating positive, transformative interactions. We aim to support the industry in enhancing their daily work, fostering growth, and driving more effective public participation.

This guide includes valuable contributions from the Neighborhood Relations Team within the City of Orlando and two Philadelphia-based community action organizations, Impact Services and Broad Street Ministry, which involved conducting interviews with partners from various capacities where conflict mitigation and de-escalation strategies play a crucial role. Additionally, we extensively researched and reviewed numerous toolkits, white papers, and guides to provide practitioners with a wide range of tactics and strategies tailored to public participation contexts.

Who is This For?

This Guide was developed for anyone leading the public participatory process on behalf of an entity. This can include:

- State, Local, and Federal Government
- Transit Agencies
- Urban Planners
- Engineers
- Community Development Corporations
- Main Streets and Elm Streets
- Universities
- Nonprofits
- *and many more!*

Resources for Communities

The Impact Services/NKCDC curriculum for community members is a highly recommended companion for community members and leaders: www.traumainformedcommunity.org

The City of Orlando also includes conflict training in their community leaders curriculum program: www.orlando.gov/ilead

Potential Sources of Conflict

People come from a variety of perspectives and life experiences. Public projects give people an opportunity to share with organizers or public leaders who the public perceive as authority figures. A participant's passion or concern for a topic of conversation or their community can be expressed in ways that are abrupt, confrontational, or accusatory. Additionally, for communities who feel that those in leadership positions have failed them or eroded their trust, it is our need as facilitators to start by rebuilding a sense of trust and fostering an improved relationship with the community.

Drawing from our experience in this field, Connect the Dots has identified several common reasons for conflict and situations in which it may arise.

Delicate Topics

Certain topics evoke strong emotions, deeply held beliefs, or contentious debates. Discussions related to religion, politics, race, or other sensitive subjects have the potential to escalate conflicts quickly.

How Conflict Can Manifest

A public forum on the use of a City building - the former Philadelphia Police headquarters - led to conversations between individuals with opposing views on racial and cultural integration, public safety, and violence.

A History of Trauma

Historical inequalities, discrimination, or social injustices can create a backdrop of tension and mistrust, leading to conflicts in public participation processes. Past experiences of marginalization or systemic bias can influence how participants engage with each other. Systemic environmental conditions such as violence and intergenerational poverty play a role in contentious processes.

How Conflict Can Manifest

Pati Codina of Impact Services explains that systemic trauma often translates to more violent and more sudden shifts to escalated behavior, where everything is intrinsically perceived as an attack. When there is trauma in a particular community, these triggered responses can become increasingly commonplace and highlight the need for a trauma-informed approach.

Potential Sources of Conflict

Misunderstanding or Misinformation

The wealth of information available to the public through the press, social media, and community networks is a tremendous asset in promoting projects, but in nuanced or complex projects these formats can lead to assumptions about the process or the intended outcomes.

How Conflict Can Manifest

Hundreds of people turn up at a public meeting to protest cuts to transit service after seeing a Facebook post, but the changes are more nuanced than presented. Presenters struggle to explain it would result in positive changes because participants are too angry to listen.

Differing Perspectives

Public participation often involves individuals from diverse backgrounds, each with their own set of identities, values, and interests. Conflicts may arise when these perspectives clash or when participants feel that their identities are not adequately represented or respected.

How Conflict Can Manifest

Members of a Steering Committee with differing life experiences become locked in tension and arguments about the purpose of their goals for a Comprehensive Plan, as how they view the future is closely tied to their values and personal identity.

Precedent of Poor Engagement

When communities feel that their voices have been ignored in previous decision-making processes, they may exhibit skepticism, frustration, or resistance. Lack of meaningful community engagement in the past can contribute to conflicts in present and future participatory efforts.

How Conflict Can Manifest

Residents in a neighborhood who feel their opinions about development and displacement have been disregarded in the past protest the process for approving new development in the community.

Develop Your Skill Set & Mindset

Successful conflict management requires managing the emotions of the crowd, but also the facilitator themselves. There are countless resources available for facilitation guidance, but the first step in successfully managing conflict is self-awareness and mindset entering into interactions with the public. Many resources examined for this guide suggested developing a practice of mindfulness and meditation, but we have also identified some resources that will help both before conflict and in the moment.

Creating a Personal Safety Plan

Impact Services has developed recommendations for a personal safety plan that you and your team members can complete to have a heightened sense of control over their emotions and reactions when an escalated situation starts to materialize. It is helpful to keep these with you at your desk if you frequently field phone calls, and to share these with each other prior to any group sessions that team members will be participating in together.

Questions to help develop your Personal Safety Plan:

- How do you know when you are so upset that you have lost control of your feelings?
- What do you do when your emotions get too intense?
- What usually helps when you feel this way?
- What will be your plan for coping in a safe way when you become extremely angry or upset?

Plan actions to perform if you become stressed:

1. Something simple and low-key that won't require outside resources or attract any attention from participants to perform the activity.

2. Something that requires another person, place, or thing to complete. This may include removing yourself from the situation or talking to someone else.

Some suggested techniques engaging a variety of senses:

- Focus on deep breathing
- Smell something
- Repeat a phrase in your mind
- Take a drink of water or momentary pause before reacting
- Seek outside help/support from a colleague or friend
- Remove yourself from the situation

Pati Codina of Impact Services emphasises this as the importance of "grounding," where you intentionally focus on shifting yourself out of the stress-induced and primal fight or flight mode.

Develop Your Skill Set & Mindset: Using the CLARA Method

The CLARA method is a practical approach to more effective communication and engagement. The technique emphasizes the importance of active listening and thoughtful response. By pausing, listening attentively, and affirming understanding before responding with respect, facilitators create a structured and inclusive environment, enabling consistent and meaningful engagement with participants.

This method was first developed to help in family settings, but is widely applicable in a variety of settings, from one-one-one interactions, to group discussions, conflict resolution, training sessions, and public engagement processes, fostering inclusive and constructive interactions. Each letter in CLARA represents a crucial step in the process:

Center – Encourages facilitators to create a focused and present mindset.

Listen – Emphasizes active listening, giving full attention to participants' perspectives and concerns.

Affirm – Involves affirming understanding and acknowledging participants' viewpoints.

Respond – Entails providing a thoughtful and respectful response.

Add – Encourages facilitators to contribute additional information or insights to enrich the conversation.

Most facilitators begin their interactions, particularly in heightened situtions, instinctively at the fourth step. Using CLARA resets our framework to remind us to slow down, listen, and assure understanding before responding.

Cultivating a Shared Mindset

Setting expectations for all staff working with the public is important, and that can even go to a shared mindset of how the public is viewed. Older approaches to planning created adversarial lines between the project team and the community, but the reality is there are many shared values for those passionate about the built environment. Persisting through difficult conversations to build trust and understanding between facilitators and participants takes time and patience, but if you expect the worst to happen, you will see the worst in everything. Instead let's imagine the best possible outcome of what a public meeting would look like, even if there is conflict present. Taking a moment before public interactions to review the mindset guidelines below can help reset those skills.

Facilitator Mindset & Guidelines for Public Interactions

- We are entering with an **open mind, empathy, and a willingness to listen.**
- There is **something to be learned** from every interaction.
- Opinions shared about the work are **not opinions about you, your worth, or the value of your contributions** to the project.
- Some conversations may be uncomfortable, but **discomfort is temporary and finite.**
- Remember that for many community members, there are not a lot of places where they are seen and heard. Many people just need the **space to share their frustrations and feelings.**
- When speaking with an escalated or emotionally-charged participant, **remain calm** and resist the natural tendency to mirror behavior and emotions, such as our overall body language and tone of voice.
- We cannot always answer every question or solve every problem in the moment, but recording all concerns and **sharing how and when participants will receive answers is our responsibility**.
- **We are a team** and here to back each other. If a participant is emotionally charged or escalated, a moderator or another facilitator may need to step in to reset the interaction.
- If you need to take a break, **take a break.**

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Planning Public Meetings

The hallmark of many participatory processes is the public meeting. These are taking increasingly varied forms - Open Houses, pop up events, compensated focus groups, and other solutions - as those working with the public seek to better understand and accommodate community members' schedules and capacity. Conflict can occur in any format, and facilitators should be well prepared to converse with emotionally-charged community members in any context. This section shares tools and steps that can be taken to keep these public interactions safe and positive spaces for participants and facilitators, both before and during the events.

Before the Meeting

Before any kind of public event, we work to make our public interactions welcoming, safe spaces for everyone who is involved. Anticipating potential conflict, envisioning the experience of participants, setting ground rules, and ensuring that meeting materials are accessible and understandable to prevent frustration and misunderstanding are all important steps to take to prevent common sources of conflict before they even arise.

Anticipate Potential Conflict

Learning more about the local situation and foreseeing potential conflict is your best course of action during preparation. At Connect the Dots, we emphasize the importance of using time during **Phase Zero**, before a project begins public engagement phases, to focus on building connections, learning and gathering input from clients and stakeholders to discover more about their past outreach and engagement processes, abilities, and results. This information assists our team in designing the meeting formats and content, and ensures we have the key information to questions available to address community needs. Speaking to close community partners or having a brainstorm with the project team to prepare for potential sources of conflict is another way to prepare prior to a meeting.

Carefully Select Location

Meeting location matters! Laure Biron from Broad Street Ministry told us, "Beginnings and endings are important," reminding us that in all public interactions and meetings to particularly consider the first and last moments that participants will remember from the event. Some items to consider when setting up a meeting space?

- What will participants' experience be entering, remaining in, and exiting the space? How does it engage the five senses?
- Is there a welcoming, low-stress check-in? Are there securitized barriers that would affect perception of safey? What will be the first and last things that people see when they arrive and leave?
- How accessible is the space for your specific community? Imagine how people of different ages, abilities, cultural or linguistic backgrounds will walk through the front door.
- Is the space inviting and open, non-threatening and comfortable with available seating and access to refreshments?
- Is there anything more we can do to make constituents feel invited into the space?

Planning Public Meetings

Set Ground Rules

Setting ground rules before a meeting and making attendees aware of them at the beginning, whether it's a virtual or in-person meeting, establishes the framework for how the meeting will be conducted and the expected behavior. It's critical to establish and uphold guidelines that ensure all participants, facilitators, and staff are treated with kindness and respect. Emphasize that the space is meant for diverse views and opinions from the wider community, and ensure comments are focused on specific issues rather than individuals. Clearly state a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory, harassing, or inappropriate language, and outline the consequences for such behavior. For online meetings, consider additional guidelines for chat and Q&A functions. Having consistent rules for all meetings within a project or organization also helps set clear expectations.

DO

Allow for a public discussion. Everyone has a chance to talk.

Seek first to understand, not to be understood. Ask questions to seek clarification when you don't understand the meaning of someone's comments.

Participate. You may be asked to share what you think, or we may ask for comments from those who haven't spoken. It is always OK to "pass" when you are asked to share a comment.

Listen to and respect other points of view.

Do your best to understand the pros and cons of every option, not just those you prefer. Be as objective and fair-minded as you can be.

State your name and where you live. In a public meeting, it is helpful to know who is speaking as well as where they live in the community.

DON'T

Turn this into debate. The purpose is not to win an argument, but to hear many points of view and explore many options and solutions.

Dominate a discussion. If you have already voiced your ideas, let others have an opportunity. When you speak, be brief and to the point.

Don't have side conversations. Pay attention to the person speaking. If you think you will forget an idea that comes to mind, write it down.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension

Graphics by Connect the Dots
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Planning Public Meetings

Simplify Communication Materials

Misunderstandings and frustrations often contribute to conflicts, and one source is confusing meeting materials. The Orlando Neighborhood Relations team recognizes that the way information is presented impacts how residents engage with ideas, and it can prevent conflicts by ensuring that residents have access to information in a clear and accessible format. By providing the necessary information upfront, in a way that is easily understandable, misunderstandings and frustrations can be minimized. Here are some tactics that can be employed to structure communication and mitigate conflicts:

Clearly state the goals and objectives of both the project and the meeting: What will be discussed and how the information gathered will contribute to the final outcome?
We also recommend including the project timeline at this point, with a description of where in the process the current meeting falls, as well as a summary of any past public input and how it has been incorporated.

Consider how people process information differently - auditory, visual, and hands-on learners - in how you produce materials for public meetings.
In recent open house meetings, we have incorporated a "Presentation Station," where online interactive materials can be used together with project staff for participants who might not have the online access or digital literacy to see these interactive tools on their own.

Focus on plain language based on an accessibility standard of a 8th-grade reading level so everyone will be able to access the information.
Most professional content starts at Grade 14 or higher. We use a tool called The Hemingway App to judge reading level: hemingwayapp.com. Text can be copied and then edited directly in the app.

Adapt information to ensure accessibility for a diverse constituency, particularly for online materials.
Ensure images and maps are described with text for screen readers, and the relevancy of graphics showing data and statistics are explained clearly. Many people struggle to read maps, particularly maps showing changes or differences in comparison. Adding landmarks (schools, churches, grocery stores) and explanations of what the content is saying is important for accessibility.

Use the Pre-Meeting Checklist provided in the appendix for your next public meeting!

During the Meeting

An important aspect of public meetings is that they are a forum for expressing concerns, which are often connected to strong emotions and experiences. Facilitators must allow space for the expression of thought and emotion, but it is extremely important to redirect conflict that escalates to derailing the goals of the public process. How do you leave space for venting without letting it completely take over the agenda? The tactics detailed below can help in responding to heightened situations.

Create a Parking Lot, Redirect, and Reorient

Creating a visible parking lot of ideas allows for a clear indication that all concerns are heard and recorded, even when they are not on topic for the specific event. These can be placed visually on a poster, using sticky notes or another recorded format that provides a "parking lot" or resting space for those ideas. This tactic can support constituents in knowing that their concerns are being considered, while also keeping the conversation moving forward on relevant topics.

Reorient the conversation to center around respect and the end goal. Reiteration and acknowledgment can be a powerful combination. Removing the focus away from the individual's specific set of circumstances and interests, and instead focusing on servicing the needs of the community can be a beneficial conflict mitigation tactic.

Whenever possible, connect people with concerns to relevant staff or departments that would have the information they need. If the relevant party is not in the room, our partner Cindy Light from the City of Orlando recommends taking the extra step to follow up with the participant within 24-48 hours after the event to see if they were able to find an answer to their concern. This small action can help support relationship-building.

Handling the Fear of Change

It is natural for humans to resist novel concepts or unfamiliar experiences that may be uncomfortable or disruptive. The fear of change is a recurring root cause of tension and a motivator for participating in a public process. In many cases, an individual or group of individuals have not considered how proposed changes could positively benefit their lives, but simply want to avoid any change altogether.

The SELF exercise shared with us by Impact Services focuses on discussing the change in question, its associated emotions, and walking through its real-world implications. When discussed together, this tactic can help people realize the often exaggerated perceived threat, and to instead consider positive alternatives. Try addressing this knee-jerk reaction by asking participants to assess a given change through 4 angles:

Safety – What are the emotions surrounding safety or sense of security brought on by the change?

Emotion – How do they feel surrounding the adoption of the change?

Loss – What do they lose around the adoption of the change?

Future– What does the situation look like once the change is adopted?

SELF Exercise

For understanding emotional reactions to change.

Safety

What feelings of safety or sense of security are affected by the change?

Emotion

What feelings surround the adoption of the change?

Loss

Is anything lost through the adoption of the change?

Future

What does the situation look like once the change is adopted?

SELF Exercise Source: Impact Services Connected Community,

Graphic by Connect the Dots, www.connectthedots.us

New Approaches for Group Settings

Adding innovative components to group settings can shift interactions, but these are not one-size-fits-all. For this section, we have divided the approaches in small groups and large groups.

Small groups we consider to have a limited number of participants, typically ranging from a handful to around 20 individuals. These smaller groups are conducive to more intimate and interactive discussions, allowing for deeper engagement and participation. In most processes, smaller groups are encountered in steering committee meetings, focus groups, or community leader roundtables.

On the other hand, large groups in public participation settings typically involve an unrestricted number of participants, ranging from several dozen to hundreds or even thousands of individuals. Large groups often require different facilitation techniques and strategies to ensure effective communication and meaningful participation.

Tactics for Small Groups

Small groups allow for more opportunities to slow down and check in on participants in ways you might not have tried before. Having awareness of how people are feeling coming into meetings can help both the participant and the facilitator better understand the mindset and reaction of those in attendance.

Adding Emotional Check-Ins

Emotional check-ins and trauma-informed greetings are powerful tactics for quickly assessing the emotional state of individuals or a group in a meeting. They also help to ease tension among strangers and foster a sense of community. Impact Services recommends this tactic, which involves asking participants to become aware of their emotions and look towards the future. These questions can shift the focus of the meeting from a confrontational atmosphere to one centered around self-reflection and connecting with fellow community members who have taken part in an important public process.

They can also serve as enjoyable icebreaker activities, such as using funny animal pictures to select an emotional state. Here are some example questions you can ask during the check-in:

- How are you feeling today?
- What emotions are present for you as you enter this meeting?
- Is there anything you'd like to share about your current state of mind?
- How would you describe your level of excitement or concern about the topics we'll be discussing?
- What do you hope to contribute or gain from this meeting?

By incorporating these check-in questions, you create a space for participants to express their emotions, establish rapport, and promote a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Setting up a Circle

In situations where a group needs to work together to develop a path forward, the use of a Circle might be an alternative to the traditional meeting format. Circles are an approach to problem solving rooted in finding shared values, rooted in the traditional practices of Indigenous Peoples of North America, which manage conflict by focusing on creating mutual understanding. Circles have a few key components:

- Four Stages: Getting Acquainted, Building Relationships, Addressing Issues, and Developing Action Plans.
- A "talking piece" that is passed to ensure only one participant speaks at a time and to encourage active listening among the other participants.
- The facilitator who is also an equal participant in the proceedings and is not expected to remain impartial.
- Participants must be carefully chosen to ensure that the meeting is considered valid.

Circles can also be adapted to have representatives participate in the circle within a larger setting of audience members, with time for public comment at the end or written comments throughout, to accommodate larger groups.

The **International Association for Public Participation** presents methods for conflict management, including circles, in its white paper Conflict Management and Public Participation, published in 2016.

Tactics for Larger Groups

Managing conflict within larger group settings can present a distinct challenge that can become especially daunting for those at the front of a room. Some different approaches can help alleviate the pressure placed by a traditional meeting format.

Designate a Local Facilitator

Designating a local stakeholder or public figure as a meeting facilitator can increase the openness of communication and relations to participants in a public meeting. This tactic is particularly relevant for public-facing consultants, who may be entering into communities with whom they have little prior knowledge or trust-bound relationships. The presence of a trusted, recognizable community member who might even know individuals personally can help set the tone for a more positive and productive exchange.

This is an approach that the City of Orlando has used exclusively on a voluntary basis, while Connect the Dots has typically paid partners for facilitation services. Both methods can be appropriate based on the context. The meeting facilitator should be materially involved in the discussion of the meeting format and promotion, and willing to speak to the project's process and the inclusion of the community to the point of the meeting.

New Approaches for Group Settings

Using an Open House

Open Houses are more and more common, but this meeting format allows for a more flexible approach for the participants' time and commitment. Connect the Dots typically recommends an open house format for large group settings, with information and interaction stations. This allows for people to have more direct contact with staff to ask questions and develop a deeper understanding of the materials. It also prevents the creation of “sides,” with staff in the front of the room and everyone else seated. Instead, participants are welcomed to the room, which is designed to be accessible and non-threatening, with seats and refreshments available.

Opportunities for verbal and written comments are both provided, so participants can provide feedback in the method that they are most comfortable. Considering the participant's experience from all angles - from entering the space to sharing feedback to the time they exit - can make the difference for a successful meeting.

Many participants do expect a structured presentation of materials. In recent meetings, we have been adding in a "Presentation Station" where a small group can view a shortened version of a presentation that is shown either on demand or at regular intervals. These can also be used to demonstrate online resources and direct participants to further information. This fulfills the expectations of attendees while still preventing the granstanding and conflict that can occur in a full presentation-style public meeting.

Calming a Storm

No matter what form a meeting takes, a participant can become emotional and agitated. When this has happened, we have found these easy actions to help keep meetings moving forward:

- Pour the person a glass of water. We have begun bringing a pitcher and cups to all our meetings, because this is so much easier to transport and more sustainable than bottled water.
- Offer to sit down with them to write and record all their concerns. Providing notecards for individuals to also write their own concerns out themselves is also a helpful exercise to help someone organize their thoughts.
- Ask questions, trying to understand their needs and perspective based on the exercises you've seen in this Guide. What is the source of conflict? Is the Fear of Change involved? How can CLARA or the SELF exercise help you?
- Get contact information and provide a clear time for follow up for any questions that can't be answered in the moment.
- If someone can't be calmed down, ask to take a walk with them so that others can continue to provide input. Some people need to vent their anger before they are calm enough to listen.

Taking Care of Your Team

It's so important for facilitators to take care of themselves and their team members during the participatory process. Both Impact Services and Broad Street Ministries discussed the difficulties of avoiding "compassion fatigue," and how they encourage their staff to continually find the heart of their work and connect with their mission to maintain a positive mental attitude. Many participatory processes can be long, with multiple rounds of engagement. Keeping momentum is important not just for the public, but for the resiliency of the facilitators, as well.

Working Together in the Field

Engagement and outreach should not be a solo effort. Sometimes the only solution to reset an interaction is for a new staff member to step in and redirect the conversation. The new entry to the conversation can calm the participant if they have reached a heightened emotional state in conversation with another team member. Assign staff to work in pairs or teams in advance, or ensure that staff in close proximity stay aware of each others' areas to keep an eye on when to step in during a conversation.

Ensure team members are aware of each others' safety plans and are prepared to help each other. Adding an agenda item for an emotional check-in for team members both before a public event and after, at the debrief, creates space to support one another in those moments. We have also created a Worksheet for Faciltators we encourage you to share with your teammates prior to public events!

> We've begun adding the Facilitator Mindset from earlier in this document to our meeting plans, along with any guidlines for the meeting itself that will be publicly displayed. This puts our approach front and center for our collaborators, so everyone can see how we will enter the space from the onset of our planning.

Supporting Your Team Long-Term

Supporting your team within the wider organization is crucial for fostering a positive work environment and maximizing individual and collective productivity.

- Openness and transparency are key factors in creating an atmosphere where team members feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, concerns, and ideas.
- Encouraging peer support and collaboration promotes a sense of camaraderie and shared responsibility, allowing team members to learn from one another and collectively problem-solve.
- Recognizing the need to pivot and adapt to changing circumstances demonstrates organizational agility, not failure, and ensures the team remains resilient and responsive to evolving challenges.
- Embracing a culture of tolerance for mistakes and failures not only encourages innovation and risk-taking but also provides opportunities for growth and improvement.

By providing some of these necessary support structures and fostering an inclusive and supportive culture, organizations can empower their teams to thrive and achieve their full potential.

In Closing

We hope you are able to use this document as a valuable companion for navigating the participatory process, and as a reference guide to navigate conflicts and enhance public participation.

Included on the next pages are two quick reference pieces that you might find useful:

- **Pre-Event Checklist:** A quick guide to ensure you have thought about some of our techniques for preventing conflicts prior to a meeting.
- **Day-Of-Event Worksheet:** A reference document for you and your team

As you adapt the tools and methods to fit specific contexts or customize them based on individual needs, we are always happy to hear about your experiences and results. **If you have suggestions for improvements to the guide, or you would like to request a training, please feel free to reach out to us: hello@connectthedots.us**

Acknowledgments

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We're fortunate to collaborate with community partners who bring valuable experiences and expertise in conflict de-escalation and training. Their insights empower professionals in public participation to navigate conflicts effectively.

Impact Services: Sincere thanks to **Pati Codina** and **Ellie Matthews** for their contributions. Pati and Ellie have shared incredible insight into their work in Philadelphia's Kensington community. The Impact Services and NKCDC guide to trauma-informed engagement for community members, Connected Community Toolkit, provided incredible resources for the development of this guide for professionals. It can be downloaded at: www.traumainformedcommunity.org

City of Orlando Neighborhood Relations Team: Thanks to **Cindy Light, Jennifer Chapin,** and **Gedline Lincifort** from the City of Orlando's Neighborhood Relations team. Their commitment to helping neighborhood organizations and residents access city services and community resources has greatly improved the quality of life in Orlando's neighborhoods, and their published document “Managing Conflict in Neighborhood Meetings” was a strong reference.

Broad Street Ministries: Many thanks to **Laure Biron** for contributions and perspective in working with at-risk populations in Philadelphia. As the CEO of Broad Street Ministries, Laure has provided us with insight into direct services and how conflict de-escalation strategies can be used firsthand in a variety of interactions, promoting dignity, respect, and community connections.

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Connect the Dots

CONTACT US

973-820-5352
hello@connectthedots.us
www.connectthedots.us

1617 John F. Kennedy Blvd.
20th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19148

ABOUT US

Connect the Dots is an outreach and engagement firm focused on connecting diverse voices to decision-making. We build innovative, meaningful engagement and outreach methods to elevate community and stakeholder voices in participatory processes. Through our creative and iterative approach, we incorporate education and intentionally-designed interactions to ensure these processes are inclusive, accessible, and representative. This work serves to build trust and lasting connections as communities inform their own futures.

Pre-Event Checklist

- ⬡ Create a meeting agenda that allows for the two-way sharing of information and meaningful participant inputs, and the meeting's goals and objectives are clearly stated.
- ⬡ Ensure meeting communications are in plain language and understandable at an 8th grade level or lower. Visuals are accompanied by text descriptions for the visually impaired.
- ⬡ Ground Rules are clearly stated and displayed at the entry point and/or beginning of the presentation.
- ⬡ Design a staffing plan to allow for team members to work in pairs and watch for potential issues.
- ⬡ Provide a visible parking lot of ideas and someone designated to speak with highly engaged and concerned citizens in a more private setting if the need arises.

_____'s Personal Safety Plan:

Source: NKCDC & Impact Services Connected Community Curriculum

1. How do you react when your emotions get too intense? What are the physical reactions, what is happening in your mind, and what do you do?

Examples:

- *turn red in the face*
- *walk away*
- *cry*
- *wanting to get physical*
- *throw things*

2. How do you know when you are so upset that you have lost control of your feelings?

Examples:

- *start to shake*
- *sweat*
- *feel dizzy*

3. What usually helps calm or ease the intensity that will be your plan for coping in a safe way when you become extremely angry or upset?

What I can do on my own:

Something simple, low-key that won't require outside resources or attract any attention from participants to perform the activity.

Examples:

- *Take a walk outside*
- *Slow deep breaths*

What I can do with someone else's help:

Something that requires another person, place, or thing to complete. This may include removing yourself from the situation or talking to someone else.

Examples:

- *Have someone tell me "it's okay, everything is fine"*
- *Call a friend or family member*

Day-of Worksheet

Personal Check-in:

- ⬡ Enter with an open mind, empathy, and a willingness to listen. There is something to be learned from every interaction.
- ⬡ Remember that opinions shared about the work are not opinions about you, your worth, or the value of your contributions to the project.
- ⬡ Don't try to answer every question or solve every problem in the moment, but recording and hearing all concerns and sharing how and when participants will receive answers is our responsibility.
- ⬡ Some conversations may be uncomfortable, but discomfort is temporary and finite. The meeting will end, and we will have time after to discuss what we learned from it.
- ⬡ Take care that when speaking with an escalated or emotionally charged participant, you remain calm and resist the natural tendency to mirror behavior and emotions.
- ⬡ We are a team and here to back each other. If a participant is emotionally charged or escalated, a moderator or another facilitator may need to step in to reset the interaction.

Reminders for Tense Moments:

Remember Your Personal Safety Plan:

Source: NKCDC & Impact Services Connected Community Curriculum

1. How do you react when your emotions get too intense? What are the physical reactions, what is happening in your mind, and what do you do?

2. How do you know when you are so upset that you have lost control of your feelings?

3. What usually helps calm or ease the intensity that will be your plan for coping in a safe way when you become extremely angry or upset?

4. How will you ask for help when you need it?