People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Institute

Locations:

North Carolina A&T State University

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Royersford, Pennsylvania

University of Arizona

University of Wisconsin

Running Public Meetings

Why Use Public Meetings?

Public meetings are a *formal* way to solicit input from members of a community. Concerns and important issues can be identified and discussed. Public meetings differ from other types of meetings in that they need to be formal and structured, involve open participation (there is no control over who attends since you are inviting the public), and can often address a variety of issues other than just the originally intended issue. When a public meeting is held in a community it is important for the individuals in charge of the meeting to make sure the appropriate issues are covered and decided upon. However, it is also important to be aware of and address other related issues that come up during the meeting.

Who Can Use A Public Meeting?

The Conservation partnership at the District/field level and other levels as needed.

When Do You Use A Public Meeting?

Sometimes, there are legal requirements that meetings be held. At other times, meetings may be held for the purpose of decision making, problem identification, and strategic planning. The process of planning and holding the public meeting should involve as many people as feasible. Proper planning means running a meeting in a structured manner so that everyone can participate.

(Continued on reverse side)

How to set up and run a public meeting:

Checklist

1. Have someone volunteer to serve as the overall meeting coordinator.

2. Select an appropriate time and date for the meeting.

3. Arrange for a location where all interested parties can attend, or set up more than one meeting.

4. Ensure the meeting is well publicized in advance.

5. Prepare and distribute an agenda prior to and at the meeting.

6. Work to minimize conflict.

7. Prepare a "fact sheet."

8. Distribute a sheet with ground rules.

9. Show an 8-12 minute slide show which describes the past and present trends and concerns in the Soil and Water Conservation District, and ask attendees to identify future issues.

10. Have people sign up to speak.

11. Use a structured technique such as nominal group technique or paired comparisons for priority identification to ensure everyone gets an equal vote.

How Do You Set Up and Run A Public Meeting?

Here are eleven steps that will help you set up and run a successful public meeting:

1. Have someone volunteer to serve as the overall meeting coordinator.

Someone needs to be in charge. This person could be anyone who has the time and commitment to make this project successful; e.g., the chairperson of the local District Board, a staff member of NRCS, or an earth team volunteer.

2. Select an appropriate time and date for the meeting.

Examine local calendars and consult with local leaders to ensure that other events or times will not interfere with attendance. The amount of time needed for meetings may be difficult to predict. When you have an open public forum you will not have control over the total number of people who will speak, and how long the discussion period will last. Still, you need to set meeting times for the part of the agenda you have control over and stick to these times. A cardinal rule is to start on time.

3. Arrange for a location where all interested parties can attend, or set up more than one meeting.

The location should be:

- familiar
- easily accessible
- spacious
- comfortable
- climate controlled
- well-lighted
- provide microphones if the acoustics are poor

4. Ensure the meeting is well publicized in advance.

Develop mail-out fact sheets for distribution two weeks prior to the meeting and also three days prior to the meeting. Distribute information in your own newsletter, other organization's newsletters, phone, gas and/or electric bills, television, radio, posters, etc. Make direct contact with people in key leadership positions as well as key community residents who are not typical customers. Personally invite as many people to the meeting as possible.

5. Prepare and distribute an agenda prior to and at the meeting. (see sample on next page)

(Continued on next page)

Sample Agenda:

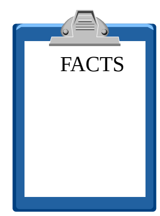
Item	**Suggested Time Allowance**
Welcome	5 minutes
Review & Agree to Ground Rules	5 minutes
Distribute and Review Fact Sheet *(see 7)*	10 minutes
Show slide show or other media presentation	15 minutes
(From this point on, recorder writes down all ideas)	
Community Voices (sign up to give statements)	depends on number in attendance
Community Voices (individuals speak)	(open to all who signed up, 5 minute statements)
Facilitated Open Discussion	Approximately 30-60 minutes
Identify priorities	30-60 minutes
Discuss follow-through and acceptance of responsibilities	30 minutes

6. Work to minimize conflict.

The following roles are needed at public meetings: timekeeper, recorder, leader, expert, and facilitator. To ensure these people perform effectively remember these tips:

- Appointing people is far safer than asking for volunteers.
- A timekeeper who doesn't call time, is worse than no time keeper at all.
- A recorder who erroneously translates what people are saying can destroy a meeting by causing great frustration.
- Recorders need to accurately record ideas and display them for everyone to see.
- Facilitators must control the meeting, remain neutral, and ensure that anyone who wants to participate gets the opportunity. Consequently, enlist a conservation partner who has facilitation training or hire a professional facilitator.
- Experts are typically NRCS staff members. Use them on an as-needed basis. However, sometimes it is useful to use experts from outside of NRCS in order to present different perspectives.

7. Prepare a "fact sheet."



Include the past and present trends of natural resource use in your District. Also include the following: purpose of the meeting, assumptions you are operating under, and future actions you anticipate.

8. Distribute a sheet with ground rules.

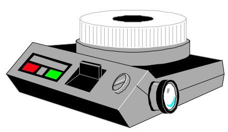
The facilitator or leader needs to post and/or distribute the rules which can always be modified.

Examples of ground rules:

- each person can speak for no more than 5 minutes
- no one can give their time to another person
- written statements may be distributed
- everyone must be courteous to one another
- no one may interrupt a scheduled speaker or anyone else at any time
- all participants who wish to speak are given the opportunity to do so
- speakers who represent a group of people should state who they represent
- all votes are equal

(Continued on reverse side)

9. Show an 8-12 minute slide show which describes the past and present trends and concerns in the Soil and Water Conservation District, and ask attendees to identify future issues.



For Example:

- Use records to identify past trends.
- Use testimonials of people who have lived in the District.
- Indicate population changes over the last 10 to 30 years.
- Use slides to indicate examples of natural resource conditions, both positive and negative.

10. Have people sign up to speak.

Make sure public meetings are well publicized beforehand so people can sign up to speak. Enable sign up prior to or during the meeting. Speakers may distribute their speech in writing, or use any available media tool. It is always a good idea to have media equipment that may be needed for presentations (i.e., slide projector, overhead projector, etc.)

11. Use a structured technique such as nominal group technique or paired comparisons for priority identification to ensure everyone gets an equal vote.

Structured decision making techniques such as the nominal group technique and the paired comparison tool ensure "one person-one vote" is respected. These techniques add a quiet orderliness to meetings by raising the stature of quiet or shy people, while at the same time, reducing the forcefulness of dominant personalities.

Where Can I Get More Information on Public Meetings?

- Running Effective Meetings, "People, Partnerships, and Community Series, Issue 5, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1997.
- Leadership Identification and Group Dynamics, National Association of Conservation Districts, 1994.
- Cogan, Elaine, Successful public meetings : a practical guide for managers in government, San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 1992.
- Social Sciences Institute WebSite: http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/SocSciInstitute/

Social Science is the scientific study of human behavior. It helps us better understand the forces that affect us in social situations. A range of social science topics includes culture, social interaction, communications, groups and organizations, the economy, and social change.

People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Institute

Locations:

North Carolina A&T State University

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Royersford, Pennsylvania

University of Arizona

University of Wisconsin

Running Effective Meetings

This issue contains key points to keep in mind when designing and conducting effective meetings. It also includes a checklist that you may copy and use when planning, running or attending a meeting.

Why should you use this?

An effective meeting can be described as one which achieves goals, and involves all participants. This sounds simple, but many meetings, through a lack of planning and poor execution, are not effective.

As The Conservation Partnership moves into "bridge-building" with a broader audience, meetings of all sizes and kinds will become more important to our business activities.

Remembering the key points and using the checklist will help you conduct more effective meetings. It will also allow you to make better use of your time and resources.

Who should use this information?

People who conduct and participate in meetings.

"If you don't have a clear goal and agenda, don't have a meeting!"

When can this information be applied?

This information can be used when a member of The Conservation Partnership needs to conduct or participate in a meeting. These simple techniques are effective for meetings designed to obtain or distribute information, garner community input, and resolve differences.

How do you run more effective meetings?

Effective meetings don't just happen. They are the result of a three part process that accounts for the needs of both meeting organizers and meeting attendees. These process stages are preparation (before the meeting), conducting a meeting (during the meeting), and follow-up (after the meeting).

These stages are provided in the handy checklist that follows. Make copies of this checklist and take it with you when plan, run, or attend a meeting.

(continued on reverse side)

Key Items for Effective Meetings

- Prepare agenda
- Have specific goals and objectives
- Roles (leader, facilitator, recorder) are recognized and accepted by all participants
- Emphasis of a meeting should be on getting the job done rather than on who controls the meeting
- Maintain an informal, relaxed atmosphere
- Stay with agenda times and items
- Encourage all meeting attendees to participate
- Everyone understands and accepts the agenda and goals for the meeting
- Brainstorming is encouraged; i.e., all suggestions are visibly written, no suggestion is right or wrong.
- Everyone's ideas should be heard; encourage sharing of ideas.
- If possible, agreements are reached by consensus. If consensus is not possible, a majority decision is desirable.
- Criticism is frank and without personal attack

Effective Meeting Checklist

Before the Meeting

- ☐ Define the goal of the meeting. Make sure it's realistic.
- ☐ Decide what to accomplish at the meeting.
- ☐ Make sure the goal can be accomplished in one meeting.
- ☐ Develop a list of questions and problems to start group discussion.

Prepare the following in advance:

- ☐ Facilities (For example: seating, audio visual equipment, lighting, temperature, etc.)
- ☐ List of participants (keep numbers in line with meeting purpose)
- ☐ Agenda with time frames
- ☐ Discussion outline

Conducting a Meeting

- ☐ Start on time.
- ☐ Group members should introduce themselves.
- ☐ Discuss "housekeeping" items. (For example: breaks, restroom location, refreshments, etc.)
- ☐ Follow the agenda to accomplish the desired purpose.
- ☐ Make sure everyone participates.
- ☐ Stimulate, guide, and control discussion.
- ☐ Strive to achieve consensus (at best), or majority decisions (at worst).
- ☐ Accurately capture comments.

Before You Adjourn:

- ☐ Firm up decisions.
- ☐ Make assignments for pending work items.
- ☐ Set up next meeting times, dates, and purpose, if needed.

Follow-up

- ☐ Have action items, tasks, people, and times clearly identified.
- ☐ Prepare report/minutes of the meeting.
- ☐ Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting.
- ☐ Decide how subsequent meetings can be improved.
- ☐ Leader should periodically check on progress of work items.

Where to look for more information:

Carnes, William T.
Effective Meetings for Busy People:
Let's Decide It and Go Home
IEEE Press ed., 1987

Tropman, John E
Effective Meetings:
Improving Group Decision Making
Sage Publications, 1996

Shelton, Maria M. and Laurie K. Bauer
The Secrets of Highly Effective Meetings
Corwin Press, 1994

People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Institute

Locations:

North Carolina A&T State University

Colorado State University

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Royersford, Pennsylvania

University of Arizona

University of Wisconsin

Dealing with Difficult People

Introduction

All of us at one time or another have had to deal with disagreeable people both on and off the job. The results of how we interact with these people can range from total disruption and emotional outburst, to an easily shrugged off minor irritation. This information sheet provides tips on how to deal effectively with difficult people so that tension is diffused and smooth interaction is attained.

Who needs this information?

Everyone in the conservation partnership is capable of learning how to deal with difficult people. It is important to remember that, except for a small portion of the general population, people basically want to get along and want to avoid conflict. However, we are all capable of losing control. When people become difficult to deal with (i.e., extremely emotional or hostile), there is usually a reason. In these situations, we need to try to understand and address the reason or the situation may grow increasingly more hostile with future interactions.

When can this information be used?

Conflicts can occur in one-on-one situations, or in small or large groups. In a companion *People, Partnerships and Community* issue titled "Conflict Management - Issue 12," we explain how to manage conflict in one-on-one, small or large groups. This information sheet is designed to provide more detailed tips for one-on-one conflict situations.

Conflict with difficult people can occur anywhere and at anytime. Hostile or difficult behavior can be a result of mis-communication, mis-understanding, conflicting personal values, or an unfair situation. We have to understand that in some cases people may have every right to be upset. In other cases, they may be wrong, while in most cases there is a lot of uncertainty with respect to who is right and who is wrong. When people lose control, we need to minimize the possibility of the situation turning violent. We can do this by listening, not arguing, and not being judgmental. Occasionally, if we give people the opportunity to vent their frustrations, the hostility will fade away. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. There are a few people who can be inflexible, hateful, bitter, closed minded and smugly confident of their knowledge. Recognize these people, and remember that it is sometimes best to walk away and not waste your time engaging in destructive discussions. Resolving conflicts takes a joint effort.

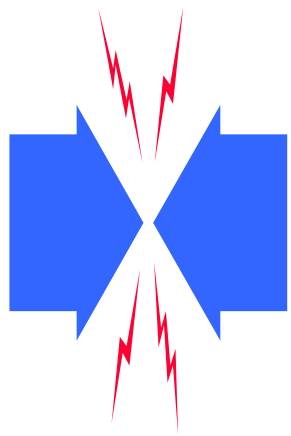
(continued on reverse side)

How do you deal with difficult people?

When faced with a difficult person, try to find out WHAT is upsetting them and WHY. Only after someone identifies a cause can you start to try to address the problem. In some cases, you may only be able to help yourself or the other person understand the problem, but this may not necessarily resolve the conflict.

Some tips to diffuse hostility in a person are as follows:

- do not become emotional yourself,
- do not interrupt,
- allow the other person to speak until they are finished,
- try to understand what they are saying; give them feedback that shows you are trying to understand them *(e.g., "It sounds like you are saying USDA has unreasonable rules. Have I correctly interpreted what you are saying?"),*
- never use an accusatory message *(e.g., "YOU don't know what your talking about.")* Instead a better approach would be *"My understanding of the situation is different. Let's see if we can find out why we have differing views."*
- if you are wrong, apologize and ask what you and he/she can do to right the wrong *(e.g., "I apologize, how can WE fix this?"),*
- if you disagree, do it professionally and unemotionally *(e.g., "I see what you are saying, but we are required to follow the laws/rules of Congress/ USDA"),* DON'T repeat the same phrase over again when they object. Instead really try to explain the problem to them.
- ask him/her to help you both come up with as many options as possible *(e.g., "Let's try to think of some solutions...")*



How do you deal with underlying causes of hositility?

Once you reduce the tension, you may still need to figure out why this person was hostile in the first place. The following list presents some situations where conflict could arise, along with general solutions.

Creating a nuisance:

- The right to exercise one's freedom can sometimes create a nuisance. People have a right to do anything as long as it does not create a nuisance. **SOLUTION:** When a person's actions become a nuisance, avoid the nuisance or separate the irritating individual from those being bothered.

Conflicting personal values:

- The conservation ethic is a set of values. Values express what a person thinks is "right" or "ought to be". A conflict that develops over values is not because of the value per se, but rather whether the values should be imposed on someone else. Conflict over values is most likely to occur with legal or political action. **SOLUTION:** This often depends on the situation. For example, a strong advocate of private property rights believes that they are free to do anything they want with their land. Because there may be different interpretations of legislation regarding this issue, it is necessary (and wise) to obtain information about certain property laws or even have the legal documents (or their references) with you. If a conflict over this issue arises, you can help to interpret gray areas and point out those that are clear-cut. Work with the individuals involved to compromise on the gray areas but indicate where you also have to follow the law. Sometimes, it helps to point out larger environmental consequences of their actions.

Problems of perception:

♦ If there is disagreement about "what someone saw" (i.e. "what is"), this challenges an individual's fundamental beliefs which can then cause a conflict. Challenging what someone thinks they saw (e.g. non-wetland vegetation in a field that has hydric soils) is a threat to their perception of reality. **SOLUTION:** Depending on the situation and the nature of the relationship between the two individuals experiencing conflict, the solution may be to seek help from an outside expert to verify or dispel the accuracy of the belief in question. In this example, there may be need for a certified wetlands specialist to visit the field in question and conduct an evaluation.

Where Can I Get More Information?

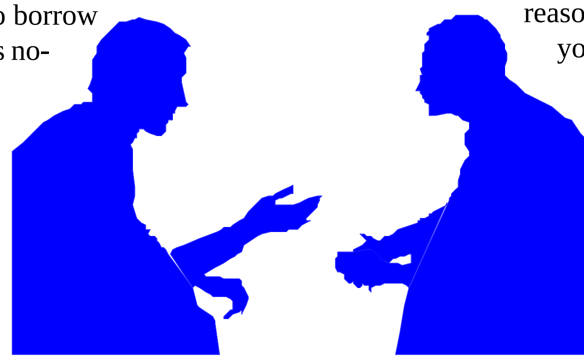
- Rubin, J.Z., Pruitt, D.G., & Kim, S.H. Social Conflict - Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement. Second Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc, 1994.

- SSI *People, Partnerships and Communities* Issue titled "Conflict Management" (Issue 12)

-SSI Web page: http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/socsciinstitute

Competing uses of limited resources:

♦ You are faced with several farmers who need to borrow the district's no-till drill. **SOLUTION:** Some solutions might be to have the farmers help each other with the planting so that each field gets done faster and also get many fields planted in the same day; try to get the farmers to rent another drill from a neighboring farmer; or have several farmers pay for custom no-till planting.



Obliviousness:

♦ At times you may be faced with a situation where you might think there should be a conflict, but there is not. A farmer who continues to use a moldboard plow on a highly erosive hilly field should be experiencing conflict with himself and his neighbors because he is causing excessive erosion. **SOLUTION:** A possible solution would be to visit the farmer and talk about the expense and impact of sediment running off of their farm clogging nearby streams, destroying trout habitat and killing fish. If this farmer were also a trout fisherman, a little education could go a long way. Quite often people are not aware of the consequences of their actions.

Rude customers:

♦ The worst thing that can happen in a discussion is to resort to name calling and insults. As a government official there is never a reason for this but you may be faced with a customer who resorts to this kind of behavior. This usually occurs when the customer is competing with someone or is suspicious of the government in general. **SOLUTION:** A solution would be to try to diffuse the tension and find out what is bothering the individual. NEVER respond with more insults. Insults used in a conflict are about three times as destructive as just disagreeing with the individual.

If a negative situation can be neutralized with both parties still respecting one another, subsequent discussion can lead to meaningful resolution including creative thinking and cooperative problem solving.

Social Sciences Institute staff & locations

Frank Clearfield, Director

Kim Berry, Sociologist
Greensboro, NC
(910)334-7464
berryk@ncat.edu

Kevin P. Boyle, Economist
Madison, WI
(608) 262-1516
kboyle@ssc.wisc.edu

Gail Brant, Sociologist
Royersford, PA
(610) 792-9207
gbrant@po.nrcs.usda.gov

Andrea Clarke, Social Scientist
Fort Collins, CO
(970) 498-1895
aclarke@tasc.usda.gov

James Cubie, Policy Analyst
Arlington, VA
(703) 235-4808
james.cubie@usda.gov

Michael Johnson, Cultural Anthropologist
Tucson, AZ
(520) 626-4685
mdjnrcs@ag.arizona.edu

Jeffrey Kenyon, Sociologist
Madison, WI
(608) 265-3646
jkenyon@ssc.wisc.edu

Barbara Wallace, Community Planner
Grand Rapids, MI
(616) 942-1503
bwallace@po.nrcs.usda.gov

For more information about the Social Sciences Institute, contact:

Frank Clearfield, Director
Social Sciences Institute
North Carolina A&T State University
Charles H. Moore Building, A-35
Greensboro, NC 27411
(336) 334-7058
clearf@ncat.edu

**Visit the SSI Homepage:
http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/socsciinstitute**

Product Catalog Available

Are you interested in materials that assist you in implementing locally-led conservation? Or, are you curious about the products and training available from the Social Sciences Institute?

For a free catalog, contact the Social Sciences Institute-Grand Rapids. Telephone (616) 942-1503. Email bwallace@po.nrcs.usda.gov.

People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

National Science & Technology Consortium

Social Sciences Institute

Locations:

North Carolina A&T State University

Colorado State University

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Royersford, Pennsylvania

University of Arizona

Arlington, Virginia

University of Wisconsin

Conflict Management

Why is Understanding Conflict Management Important?

Social conflicts begin with one party wanting something that another party resists doing or providing. Conflicts cover a myriad of different circumstances that range from mundane tests of wills between parents and children, to conflicts between legal adversaries, to negotiations between sales agents and customers. Conflict management can be used to achieve consensus among individuals and groups and it can increase your understanding of differing points of views. You can learn to identify positive and negative effects of conflict, which can help you optimize your actions and understand difficult situations. Below are some potentially positive and negative aspects of conflict and how they can affect you and others.

Negative Aspects of Conflict

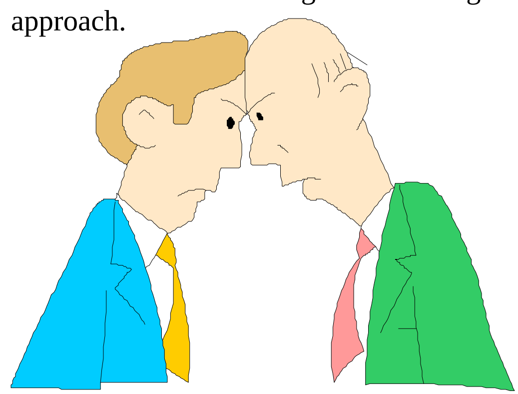
- become less motivated and inactive
- confused by differences of opinions
- increases inter-group tension and diverts attention from objectives
- causes negative emotions and possibly violent behavior
- creates the desire to abandon the problem situation for a safer subject
- creates or increases antagonism
- causes stress and frustration

Positive Aspects of Conflict

- learn more about the people involved and grow with each conflict experience
- defines issues and provides opportunities to resolve these issues
- increases group cohesion
- leads to alliances with other groups

Who Can Use Conflict Management Techniques?

Anyone in The Conservation Partnership is potentially capable of learning how to constructively deal with conflict. You have to keep in mind that conflict situations should not be taken lightly. Resolving conflict is not a mechanical process in which applying steps “A” through “Z” guarantees a happy ending. Conflicts that are based on personalities or value systems may never be resolved but they could be minimized using the following approach.



(continued on next page)

Emotional Balance

- Keeping your own emotions under control affects the emotions of the other person.
- Keep your voice at a normal or below normal volume.
- Use phrases like, *"I understand what you are saying…"*.
- Use pauses and speak deliberately to keep the discussion at a slow pace.

When and Where is Conflict Management Used?

The process of conflict management can be used at any time, in a one-on-one or group setting. It can be applied at the office, in the field, or at home. What is described is a standard process of effective communication.

How Do You Manage Conflict?

In order to successfully manage conflict, you need to understand the principles of conflict, develop and refine your communication skills, and be able to go through a series of steps specifically designed to help you manage potential conflict situations.

Principles

The basic principles to help avoid destructive conflict and promote constructive dialogue are as follows:

- Preserve everyone's dignity.
- Don't expect to change people's personalities.
- Listen with concern.
- Be flexible while also main taining your independence.

Knowledge, Tips, And Skills

There are knowledge, tips, and skills you can learn that will enable you to manage conflict more effectively.

Knowledge in Organizational Settings

- Be observant of physical conditions of the meeting site; e.g., confined, hot areas can intensify conflicts; outdoor meetings can reduce tensions; meetings held at neutral sites can relax people; meetings on one's home turf may cause him/her to act in the extreme, either calmer or more defensive.
- Round tables give everyone equal seating status.
- Rectangular tables have two dominant seats – the head and foot of the table. Try not to allow antagonists to sit in these seats. Sit in one of these seats, yourself, if you are facilitating a meeting or if you want an advantage.
- If possible, sit potential male and female antagonists side by side, not across from one another. Females may prefer to sit further away from potential antagonists than males do.
- Call breaks if a situation gets heated.

Communication Tips

- An effective communicator is a good speaker, keen observer, smiles at appropriate times, provides feedback, and can use humor to diffuse a situation and keep everyone at ease.
- Establish ground rules and verbalize them or display them: For example:
  - everyone has the opportunity to talk *uninterruptedly*
  - discuss one topic or problem at a time
  - everyone needs to treat each other with respect
- Confront issues by setting up a process that allows everyone to speak.
- Deal with issues, not personalities.
- Verify that you understand what a speaker says by summarizing their statement (e.g., "*…so it's the inflexibility of the rules that bother you.*").

Listening Skills

- Listen specifically for feelings or emotions underlying a person's message. Some people quickly reveal their core values or personality.
- Maintain eye contact, nod frequently, say "yes" or "I see" often.
- Look for nonverbal messages and their meaning; some are listed below:

(continued on next page)

Caveat: These skills, observations, and steps are not necessarily the same for all cultural groups. Consequently, if you are working with non-traditional groups, you may need to read specific information on this group and modify your approach.

Where's more information?

- *Conflict Management*, National Association of Conservation Districts in cooperation with National Association of State Conservation Agencies and the USDA Soil Conservation Service, 1994
- *Sociological Training: Module 5, Conflict Management*. USDA Soil Conservation Service, National Employee Development Staff, 1990

- *signs of aggression* — leaning forward, pointing, standing/sitting close, rapid or loud speech, glaring, interrupting others
- *disagreement with the message* — arms folded, turned away from speaker, poor eye contact
- *alert and agreeable* – sitting upright, good eye contact, quick to respond, arms open.

Six Steps to Manage A Potential Conflict

Step 1 — Diagnose the situation. Determine the conflict's content and history. Evaluate personalities and positions.

Step 2 — Involve all parties. Be a skillful questioner by asking open-ended questions. Use processes that solicit discussion, opinions, information, priorities, etc. from all people.

Step 3 — Collect all information. There are many ways to gather information; e.g., use facts, historical records, data, maps, ideas from around the table, unbiased experts, and interviews. *Remember, people's feelings are just as real to them as facts.*

Step 4 — Reinforce agreements. People who disagree often share some common goals and common values. Discover these common concerns and reinforce agreements. Write these agreements so that everyone can see them.

Step 5 — Negotiate disagreements. Disagreements are not negotiated until everyone understands the facts and feelings that caused the conflict. Review steps 1 through 4; list important disagreements; have everyone rank order their disagreements; begin with the smallest issue and work toward the largest.

Step 6 – Solidify agreements. Identify agreed upon solutions and offer compromises for unresolved issues. If a compromise cannot be reached, table the issue and move to the next issue; review any proposed agreements carefully so you are sure that everyone understands them.

Social Sciences Institute staff & locations

Frank Clearfield, Director
(see next column)

Kim Berry, Sociologist
Greensboro, NC
(336)334-7464
berryk@ncat.edu

Kevin P. Boyle, Economist
Madison, WI
(608) 262-1516
kboyle@ssc.wisc.edu

Gail Brant, Sociologist
Royersford, PA
(610) 792-9207
gbrant@telespec.itc.nrcs.usda.gov

Andrea Clarke, Social Scientist
Fort Collins, CO
(970) 498-1895
aclarke@tasc.usda.gov

James Cubie, Management Analyst
Arlington, VA
(703) 235-4808
jim.cubie@agconserv.com

Michael Johnson, Cultural Anthropologist
Tucson, AZ
(520) 626-4685
mdjnrcs@ag.arizona.edu

Jeffrey Kenyon, Sociologist
Madison, WI
(608) 265-3646
jkenyon@ssc.wisc.edu

Barbara Wallace, Community Planner
Grand Rapids, MI
(616) 942-1503
bwallace@telespec.itc.nrcs.usda.gov

For more information about the Social Sciences Institute, contact:

Frank Clearfield, Director
Social Sciences Institute
North Carolina A&T State University
Charles H. Moore Building, A-35
Greensboro, NC 27411
(336) 334-7058
clearf@ncat.edu

Visit the SSI Homepage: http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/socsciinstitute

Product Catalog Available

Are you interested in materials that assist you in implementing locally-led conservation? Or, are you curious about the products and training available from the Social Sciences Institute?

For a free catalog, contact the Social Sciences Institute.
Telephone: (616) 942-1503.
Email: bwallace@telspec.itc.nrcs.usda.gov

People, Partnerships, and Communities

The purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Institute

Locations:

North Carolina A&T State University

Ft. Collins, Colorado

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Royersford, Pennsylvania

University of Arizona

University of Wisconsin

Prioritizing Issues or Concerns

Using the Paired Comparison Technique

Why prioritize issues or concerns?

Prioritizing items discussed at a meeting with a group of people can often be difficult and time consuming. A technique called *paired comparison* can be useful for ranking items related to a particular issue that are too numerous or too similar to mentally rank order. This technique also ensures that every participant has a vote in what gets prioritized.

The use of paired comparisons can be found in situations as common as getting your eyes examined for glasses. The doctor has you look at an eye chart through a number of different lenses. The goal is to find "Which of these lenses enables you to see the eye chart better? This first one or this second one?" They switch the lenses back and forth until you tell them which one makes your vision better. Then the doctor goes on to another set of lenses and repeats the process until the best lenses are identified to correct your vision. The exam is a systematic process of presenting pairs of different lenses and eliminating lens options until the best lens is found.

Who can use this technique?

Anyone may use this technique and apply it to a collection of items addressing a particular topic or issue. This can be an especially useful technique in the Conservation Partnership when prioritizing issues such as conservation practices, resource problem areas or watershed issues.

When can this technique be used?

After brainstorming with the community

members about priority concerns in their community, you usually end up with a long list of issues. It is not always easy to prioritize that list after issues have been raised.

(continued on reverse side)

Depending on the number of items needing to be prioritized, paired comparison may be done manually or with computer software. With fewer than ten items, prioritizing the list by hand using a matrix is recommended. For longer lists of items, you might want to use a paired comparison software program.

How do you use this technique?

The following example shows you how prioritization can be done manually using a flip chart. You meet with conservation partners in a small community in your district and work with them to try to identify significant resource concerns. Through brainstorming and discussion, the community comes up with the following concerns: animal waste, cropland erosion, ground water quality, urban encroachment on farmland, biological diversity and wetlands (See Figure 1).

All of these issues are important to the community, but community members need to prioritize them to determine which item to address first. To use this technique, your first step would be to draw a matrix similar to the one shown in Figure 2.

The purpose of using the matrix is to identify all possible pairs of resource issues. Each cell in the matrix represents a pair of resource issues that will be compared to one another. For example, moving down the "Animal Waste" column, "wst/ero" represents the comparison of animal waste and erosion; "wst/urb" further down the column represents the comparison of animal waste and urban encroachment on farmland.

Brainstormed Resource Concerns

cropland erosion
animal waste
ground water quality
urban encroachment on farmland
biological diversity
wetlands

Figure 1

Paired Comparison Matrix
First Iteration

	Animal Waste	Cropland Erosion	Ground Water Quality	Urban Encroachment	Bio Diversity	Wetlands
Animal Waste						
Cropland Erosion	wst/ero					
Ground Water Quality	wst/wat	ero/wat				
Urban Encroachment	wst/urb	ero/urb	wat/urb			
Bio Diversity	wst/div	ero/div	wat/div	urb/div		
Wetlands	wst/wet	ero/wet	wat/wet	urb/wet	div/wet	

Figure 2

(continued on next page)

However, two modifications need to be made to the matrix before pairs can be used.

#1) It is senseless to compare a natural resource issue with itself (Animal Waste/Animal Waste). Therefore, where this occurs, the cell is shaded out and not used.

#2) Choosing between erosion and wetlands is the same as choosing between wetlands and erosion, so we need to eliminate any duplicate pairs. An easy way to do this is to shade out all cells above the diagonal you shaded out in #1 above. The matrix in Figure 2 clearly shows this.

Compare Pairs of Issues to Prioritize for the Community

Now we are ready to compare pairs of issues to determine which issue is the most important to the community. Start with the first pair in the upper left of the matrix (in this example it would be animal waste and cropland erosion) and work through all the pairs remaining in the matrix. Choices (or votes) can represent one individual or they can represent a group of individuals that have voted on each choice. Individual choices can later be summed up to arrive at an average choice for the group. In this example let's assume you are working with a small group of individuals.

The preference for each pair is determined by reading each possible pair off of Figure 2, taking a vote on each pair and recording the result of the vote (See Figure 3). Then, list the issues on a separate piece of paper and place a tic mark next to the issue preferred in each pair (See Figure 4). Count the tics to get the "Preference Scores".

Using the totals in our example, we can see that the community perceives urban encroachment as their number one issue. The community's second issue is erosion. Issues of animal waste and water quality are tied at 2 while diversity and wetlands each had one mark.

If issues are "tied" then another matrix needs to be constructed to do the paired comparison with the remaining issues. In this example our second matrix would look similar to Figure 5.

Comparison Results

Comparison	Preferred Choice
Animal Waste/Cropland Erosion	Cropland Erosion
Animal Waste/Ground Water Quality	Animal Waste
Animal Waste/Urban Encroachment	Urban Encroachment
Animal Waste/Bio Diversity	Bio Diversity
Animal Waste/Wetlands	Animal Waste
Cropland Erosion/Ground Water Quality	Cropland Erosion
Cropland Erosion/Urban Encroachment	Urban Encroachment
Cropland Erosion/Bio Diversity	Cropland Erosion
Cropland Erosion/Wetlands	Cropland Erosion
Ground Water Quality/Urban Encroachment	Urban Encroachment
Ground Water Quality/Bio Diversity	Ground Water Quality
Ground Water Quality/Wetlands	Ground Water Quality
Urban Encroachment/Bio Diversity	Urban Encroachment
Urban Encroachment/Wetlands	Urban Encroachment
Bio Diversity/Wetlands	Wetlands

Figure 3

Preference Scores

Issue	"Tic" Marks	Total
Animal Waste	II	2
Cropland Erosion	IIII	4
Ground Water Quality	II	2
Urban Encroachment	IIIII	5
Bio Diversity	I	1
Wetlands	I	1

Figure 4

(continued on reverse side)

Paired Comparison Matrix
Second Iteration

	Animal Waste	Ground Water Quality	Bio Diversity	Wetlands
Animal Waste				
Ground Water Quality	wst/wat			
Bio Diversity	wst/div	wat/div		
Wetlands	wst/wet	wat/wet	div/wet	

Figure 5

Again we would go through the paired comparison and selection. The process would need to be repeated with a flip chart and marker to tabulate choices once again across these remaining issues. All "ties" would need to be eliminated to obtain a final prioritization.

The final prioritization for this example, after all the "ties" were voted on again, was as follows:

1. Urban encroachment on farmland
2. Cropland erosion
3. Water Quality
4. Animal Waste
5. Wetlands
6. Biological diversity

With this list of prioritized natural resource issues, the community now has a place to start. Each participant in the process has had a vote in this prioritization.

For More Information:

For more information on this technique or to obtain a diskette with the Paired Comparison technique contact Andrea Clarke with the NRCS Social Sciences Institute at aclarke@tasc.usda.gov or call (970) 498-1895.

David, H.A. (1988). The method of paired comparisons, Alan Stuart, (Ed.). London, Great Britain: Charles Giffin and Company Limited.

Thurstone, L.L. (1927). A law of comparative judgment. Psychological Review, 34, 273-286.

SSI Web page at: http://people.nrcs.wisc.edu/SocSciInstitute/