



# First Aid Kit for Imperfect Moments

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Conflict Resolution  
Tips and Resources



# Nature of conflict

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- normal and manageable and stressful
- Protection of (competing) interests
- There is a “win-lose” attitude
- Humans bring history, perceptions, experiences, values and “stuff” into all relationships
- Trust, respect, honesty and fair dealing govern relationships – conveyed behaviorally



# Why conflict resolution is important to discuss

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- Communication is not as easy as some might think
- Technical/specialized knowledge
- A lot is at stake – creditability, money, sense of urgency, community sustainability, etc.
- Parties get “stuck” in wanting what they want
- Litigious culture – alternatives to court

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# What is important to keep in mind?

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- Quality of the working relationship
- Accountability does matters
- Stewardship over funds, process and outcomes



# Avoid or Minimize conflicts

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- Do your homework
- Clear division of roles and responsibilities
  - know ultimate decision-makers
  - who manages what part
  - contract obligations and exemptions/exceptions
  - protocol
  - legitimate sources of expertise



# Avoid or Minimize conflicts ... continued

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- Avoid the appearance of conflict or preference

# Minimizing conflict ...

## continued



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- Set communication expectations
  - frequency of contacts/schedule times
  - how to raise questions/concerns
  - be plain spoken
  - keep documentation
  - convey a willingness to work together
  - how you will communicate – email, phone, face-to-face?
  - allow enough time

# When conflict arises – informal tips



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- Do not let things fester
- Go back to the contract
- Address the concern directly with the person/s involved
- Keep it objective and non-personal
- Listen ... listen ... listen
  - to the other side
  - for underlying interests/motivations of the project
  - areas of agreement



# When conflict arises ... informal tips continued

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- Don't rush to a decision ... or be rushed or bullied
- Be solution focused – not fault finding
- Brainstorm solutions/resolutions
- Seek outside expertise/knowledge
- Establish a timeline for a decision
- Come to a mutual understanding and agreement
- Amend contract



# Conflict Resolution – formal steps

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- Seek mediation or arbitration
- File a formal complaint



# Conflict Resolution – formal steps

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- Mediation – neutral, third party helps the two parties to listen, communicate and reach a mutual agreement
- Ombudsperson – third party is available to investigate complaints and to insure that fairness and due process rights are respected; can explore a variety of solutions to an existing problem.

# Conflict resolution - strategies

- Arbitration – third party (usually knowledgeable about field) hears both sides of the dispute and makes a binding decision
- Litigation – seek amends in court





# Conflict Resolution Resources

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- Dr. John B. Stephens – Coordinator, Public Dispute Resolution Program, School of Government, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC.
- [www.mediate.com/mnnc](http://www.mediate.com/mnnc) – statewide network of 23 mediation centers
- NCRCAP
- [www.adr.com](http://www.adr.com) alternative dispute resolution



# Contact information

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N. Yolanda Burwell, Ph. D.

Senior Fellow

NC Rural Center

4021 Carya Drive

Raleigh, NC 27610

919-250-4314

[yburwell@ncruralcenter.org](mailto:yburwell@ncruralcenter.org)