

## Ten Principles of Collaborative Problem Solving

- 1 Mindsets Matter.** Mindsets are critical to bridging divides and solving problems. It's important that participants enter the collaborative problem-solving process seeing conflict as an opportunity, giving others the benefit of the doubt, being curious, empathic, and open, and prioritizing relationships over winning.
- 2 Diverse Groups Create Better Solutions.** Groups are powerful. Collaborative problem solving leverages the diversity of skills, experiences, and viewpoints within the group. Different perspectives lead to more innovative and comprehensive solutions.
- 3 Dialogue Not Debate.** Dialogue is a cooperative conversation where individuals engage in an open exchange of ideas and emphasizes understanding, listening, and a willingness to explore various perspectives. Debate, on the other hand, is a competitive conversation where individuals defend their positions and seek to win or prove a point. The focus is often on highlighting differences and showcasing one's viewpoint as superior.
- 4 Focus on Interests, Not Positions.** In every conflict both positions and interests are present. Positions are the fixed stance or demands of one side a conflict. They rarely provide insight into an individual's interests which are the underlying needs, concerns,

fears, motivations, or values that drive the positions. By focusing on interests, participants in a collaborative problem-solving process can often discover shared goals and overlapping interests that are often obscured when just examining positions.

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**Courageous Communication is Required.** Open and transparent communication is crucial to solving complex problems. The collaborative problem-solving process requires participants to share ideas, information, and feedback to ensure that interests and values are out in the open and recognized during the process.

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**Relationships Are the Foundation.** Relationships are the grease that lubricates the gears of problem solving. Invest in building trusting relationships through dialogue and ongoing demonstrations of vulnerability, courage, connection, and empathy.

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**Shared Goals Create Shared Purpose.** Collaborative problem solving provides participants with the opportunity to create and work towards a common goal. A shared purpose not only unites collective efforts, but it also serves as a compelling source of motivation and propels individuals to solve complex problems.

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**Deeper Problem Analysis Creates Deeper Understanding.** Deeper analysis of the problem and perspectives on the problem enables a deeper understanding of the underlying issues, their causes, and potential impacts. It facilitates identification of root causes and establishes a shared understanding, which, in turn, lays a strong foundation for the development of targeted and impactful strategies.



- 9 **Agreements Are the Goal.** Unlike dialogue aimed at developing understanding, collaborative problem solving goes a step further by leveraging relationships to generate agreements. These agreements include the collective wisdom of the group and address the needs of all participants.
- 10 **Don't Split the Difference, Make the Difference.** Collaborative problem-solving processes help participants move beyond their positions and reflexive "us versus them" zero-sum thinking to crafting creative solutions that integrate some of the most important needs and interests of all stakeholders. These higher ground solutions go beyond bargaining and compromise to generate wise and durable solutions.

Hosted by Convergence and Interfaith America