Collaborative processes are as unique as the people who participate in them. While there are no guaranteed methods that will work for all collaborative processes, one technique may prove helpful for uniting a diverse group of people. When managing natural resource disputes, developing a common vision of the natural resource can help participants to focus on their interests, not their solutions to the problem. People in a collaboration involving negotiation often begin the process by stating their solutions to the problem. Unfortunately this approach is considered positional and leads the group toward confrontation. Stating positions, or how the problem should be solved, tends to fragment rather than unite participants.

What is a Shared Vision?

A vision is a mental image of how you would like the natural resource to be in the future. A shared vision occurs when people involved in a negotiation discuss their ideal vision of the natural resource. A shared vision can occur in various ways. Participants in a negotiation can develop maps of a watershed or the natural resource in dispute, they can create pictures, they can verbally describe their vision, or they can discuss elements of their vision. The vision becomes shared when everyone in the negotiating group supports either the image or the key elements that make up the image. A vision can be as broad or narrow depending upon what the negotiating group wants. Two examples include:

- Maintaining a healthy range that will sustain livestock, wildlife, agriculture, and recreational uses.
- To work toward an economically sustaining and ecologically functioning ecosystem.
WHY DEVELOP A SHARED VISION?

Surprisingly, negotiators often discover through shared visioning that they each have more in common than expected. When participants in a collaborative process create a shared vision, communication becomes more open and helps lay the groundwork for mutual respect and trust. Fostering mutual respect early in the negotiation will help pave the way for building positive relationships. Positive working relationships are critical for reaching and sustaining mutual agreements. Shared visioning can be an effective technique for nurturing healthy relationships among participants.

Other advantages to developing a shared vision include providing a common focus and direction for the negotiating group. The vision will reflect the shared values of the group and serve as a roadmap or endpoint the negotiating group is striving toward. It is far easier to reach agreements and deal with differences when all participants are pulling in the same direction (toward the vision) rather than in scattered directions. Shared visioning also helps participants to reframe the dispute. Reframing means to change one’s perception. Reframing the dispute from an Us verses Them into a problem that needs solving, goes a long way in working toward mutual agreement.

Developing a shared vision helps to clarify common interests that might exist among assumed diverse viewpoints. Understanding these common interests will be helpful in forging mutually satisfying agreements. Reaching agreement on the vision enables the group to work on more difficult issues later in the negotiation.

WHEN DO YOU DEVELOP A SHARED VISION?

While a shared vision may not apply to all types of collaborative processes, it may help the negotiating group begin with a common understanding. Developing a vision for your collaboration is most advantageous during the pre-negotiation phase.

Collaborations that use negotiation to manage a natural resource dispute can be grouped into three phases; Pre-negotiation, Negotiation, and Post-Negotiation. For a detailed discussion of each of these phases refer to fact sheet numbers 99-84 through 99-89. Conducting a vision process early in the collaboration will allow people to understand each other’s perspectives and concerns, and it can help to begin the negotiation phase with agreements rather than disagreements.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A SHARED VISION?

There are countless ways to go about developing a shared vision. How you do this depends partly on the structure of the collaborative process and its purpose. Participants may be asked to draw pictures, create collages, describe images, develop maps, or discuss key elements of a vision. Individual visions turn into shared visions with the help of a skilled facilitator. A
facilitator is someone who is neutral to the dispute and is focused on improving how the group gets along and how they get things done.

Some of the skills of a facilitator include:

- **Active listening**—paraphrasing what people say to help clarify comments for everyone.
- **Questioning**—asking open-ended questions to stimulate discussion.
- **Reframing**—refocusing comments so they address the problem and rather than attacking people or stating solutions.
- **Including**—ensuring all voices are heard and providing support and encouragement to each participant.
- **Monitoring**—adjusting to the group’s needs and direction.

Using the expertise of a skilled facilitator will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and help create the vision. Shared visioning can be a difficult exercise. It asks people to picture what the natural resource could be like, while knowing what it is. Thinking of problems as they could be, rather than what they are, can be a stretch of the imagination for some people. However, the exercise can be an important step toward building common agreements for managing a natural resource dispute.

Although a shared vision may increase your chances for a successful collaboration, it does not mean your group will be free from disputes. The difficult task of a vision is not so much in creating it, but in meeting its challenge. The real test lies in the means—the details of how to get to the vision. These details will emerge from the vision and ultimately through the collaborative process. However the more clearly and consistently the vision becomes shared, the more successfully it can propel the group toward common goals.

**References and additional information**


