

Creating Conflict Competence: ULCT Training Needs and Opportunities

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ULCT and EDR Program partnership: conflict competence training program for local public officials in Utah

Purpose: To develop a training program that teaches local public officials in Utah the key skills of conflict competence and collaboration

More specifically, to develop a range of training offerings that...

- Build conflict competence and collaborative capacity among local public officials in Utah
- Address Utah local public officials' needs
- Are accessible to the full range of local public officials in Utah

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Plan for today

- Who we are
- What conflict, collaboration, and conflict competence are (and are not)
- Our plans for developing a conflict competence training program
- Preliminary findings from our situation assessment and next steps
- Discussion about training needs and opportunities
- Where to from here

Note: we are doing this workshop twice today (two back-to-back sessions)

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About the Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR) Program

- Mission: cultivate a culture of collaboration around environment and public policy issues through helping people be more skillful in dealing with conflict
- EDR = extra dialogue required
- Environment = human environment

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Let's talk about conflict and collaboration

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When you think of conflict,
what do you think of?

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How does conflict tend to make you feel?

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Who has experienced conflict in your work?

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Who has experienced conflict in your personal life?

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Who thinks that dealing with conflict is an inevitable part of being a public official?

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Conflict just is

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Conflict is:

The intersection of different needs or wants that are in tension with each other and not easily reconciled

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Conflict is NOT:

Arguing, fighting, or violence

These are destructive ways of dealing with conflict

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Conflict just is

Conflict can be destructive
if poorly dealt with

Conflict can be productive
and generative if skillfully
dealt with

How parties deal with
conflict will determine
whether it is productive or
destructive

Conflict competence is key
to making conflict
productive

Conflict competence also
helps us avoid conflict
becoming destructive and
resulting in disputes

When we need to reach
agreement on courses of
action, we need to
collaborate

Collaboration means "to co-
labor" - it is all about
working together to make
conflict productive

"Conflict competence" and
collaboration are pragmatic
skill sets that anyone can
learn (and everyone should
know!)

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**Conflict competence and
collaboration are NOT:**

“Sit down, shut up, and get along”

“Just be nice”

Compromise

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**Conflict competence and
collaboration are:**

Pragmatic skills for working through our differences in a
way that creates a truly good outcome

A “good outcome” meets all parties’ core needs (and
maybe even creates value)

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Conflict competence and collaboration are:

Skills that every public official (and every human) would benefit from

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Plan for training program development

Step 1: Situation assessment (fall 2024)

- “Diagnosis before intervention”

Step 2: Develop and launch initial training offerings (spring 2025)

- Aim to launch first offerings by the ULCT mid-year convention

Step 3: Develop and roll out additional offerings, if/as there is demand and resources (remainder of 2025)

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Situation assessment interviews

To inform the development of a conflict training program, we are conducting interviews with a diverse range of local public officials around the state.

The purpose of the interviews is to **hear how local public officials in Utah are experiencing conflict** and **what kind of training and resources would help them** be better equipped to respond to and manage conflict in their work.

We are **halfway** through interviews and will finish the remaining interviews this month. Then we'll follow-up with a survey sent to all ULCT members.

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Who are we interviewing?

We are conducting 25-30 interviews with:

- Mayors
- City Councilmembers
- City Managers
- City Attorneys
- ULCT Staff

Representing different positions in their community (e.g. elected vs appointed officials), sizes in population, regions across the state (including rural and urban areas), and political perspectives.

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What are we asking?

- How, if at all, do they experience conflict in their roles?
- How do they feel their local community is doing when it comes to dealing with conflict?
- How well do they think the broader public sector (e.g. government at all levels) is doing at working through conflict here in Utah?
- How important do they think it is that local public officials are skilled at and prepared to work through conflict in their work?
- How well prepared and skilled do they feel to deal with conflict?
- Have they taken any training that has prepared them to deal with conflict in their role?
- Do they think training and resources on how to productively navigate conflict would be helpful? If so, what kind of training?
- What training format would work best to serve public officials across Utah?

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Are Utah public officials experiencing conflict?

YES!

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Where are Utah public officials experiencing conflict?

- Between mayor and city councilmembers
- Between city councilmembers
- With city staff
- With county commissioners
- With the State Legislature
- With the public

....basically everywhere

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Training program design preferences

- Preference for multiple formats that are multi-faceted
 - In-person options (perhaps during New Elected Officials Training and at Midyear/Annual Conventions, as well as through county/regional gatherings)
 - Online options such as webinars and Zoom calls (although several mentioned being distracted online)
 - Short training block preference over full day training
 - Podcast (bite-sized snippets under an hour)
- Preference for early training (afternoons and evenings are packed)
- Preference for regional training to build relationships
- Preference for training elected officials and staff together
- Desire for role playing exercises
- Desire for small handouts/cards
- Concern over financial cost and time constraints

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What kind of training (what will it include/address)

- Communication skills
- Focusing on interests vs. positions
- Active listening skills
- How to work with and appreciate city staff
- Roles and responsibilities for mayor, city council, staff
- How to calm down in real time
- Social media training involving conflict - if and when and how to engage
- Research-based recommendations for de-escalating conflict
- Tactics for when you're personally attacked
- How to inspire out-of-the-box thinking in group settings

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Discussion

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On your own, and then in small groups

- To what extent do these findings resonate?
- What are we missing in terms of:
 - How you and other local public officials in Utah are experiencing conflict?
 - What kind of training, tools, and resources would help you and other local public officials in Utah more productively navigate conflict in your work?
 - How to make conflict competence and collaboration training, tools, and resources most helpful and accessible to you and other local public officials in Utah?
 - Anything else that will help us design trainings, tools, and resources to help you and other local public officials in Utah navigate conflict productively in your work?

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Share back:

Any key insights or takeaways from your group that we can all learn from?

Please complete the survey we will send out in about a month to share your thoughts about the training program!

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Next steps

- Fall 2024 - Finish situation assessment
 - Finish interviews (September)
 - Send out survey to all ULCT members (October)
 - Summarize situation assessment findings in a report, in which nothing will be identifiable to attributed to anyone (November)
- Spring 2025 - Design and launch first training offerings

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Next steps

- Watch for the survey
 - Fill it out!
 - Encourage other local public officials to do so as well
- Reach out to us if you have any ideas, suggestions, questions, concerns, etc.

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EDR Program Resources

Contact Jordan Katcher:
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EDR Blog:



Free Tools and Resources:



Collaboration Certificate
Course:

