



**UNIT III:
Group/
Organizational
Leadership
Skills**

Module 4:

Managing Conflicts in Groups

Differences of opinion and the resulting conflict are common to any volunteer organization or community group. When people of different backgrounds and interests come together to share decision-making, some disagreements are to be expected. Finding common ground and resolving differences will result in a stronger organization or more effective action.

The potential for conflict exist whenever and wherever people have contact. It typically involves one or more of the following:

1. Competing interests or goals.
2. Different ideas about methods of reaching goals.
3. Incomplete understanding of, or hidden, personal values and feelings.

In public decision-making, even when a goal is agreed upon, ways to implement and finance the goal may also be a source of disagreement.

Finding Common Ground

In creative management of conflict all parties need to find the common ground — that is, the goals and interests they share. This serves as a foundation for resolving differences. Rephrasing the issue as a question often makes it easier to look for solutions that are satisfactory to all parties. It is helpful for people to:

- Recognize and acknowledge that differences (conflict) exists.
- Facilitate open, accurate communication and active listening.
- Maintain an objective perspective — stay on the issues, not the personalities. However, values and emotions must be acknowledged.
- Find the common interest and goals so everybody agrees on something.
- Make the necessary adjustments, reinforce, confirm, and make the agreement work.
- Remember that conflicting ideas lead to stronger, more effective groups.

Conflict as a Difference of Opinion

Conflict can be defined as a “difference of opinion.” With that definition, it is easier to see conflict as something that is natural to community groups and relationships.¹

Conflict is often suppressed in favor of group harmony. However, suppressing conflict only drives it underground to reappear later in some more destructive form. Also, discouraging strong feelings and convictions reduces the very vitality that groups need. Conflict can stimulate new thought, lead to more creative solutions, and keep a group alert to the various interests of its members. Conflict gets internal dissension and dissatisfaction out in the open, where it can be used in making the group more responsive to its members.

As long as conflict is focused on the job to be done — rather than on personalities — the gains usually outweigh the costs.