

Tips for Focusing on Shared Interests

Seek not to be understood, but to understand

Although coalition members may share a common vision, it's important to recognize that members also have differences in thought and opinion. However, behind opposing positions lies common ground. The challenge for collaborative leaders is in maintaining the focus on shared interests. The following are tips for facilitating dialogue in order to find common ground.

Interests define the issue:

- Interests are desires and concerns, needs and fears.
- Behind opposed positions lie shared and compatible interests
- A position is something one has decided on; an interest represents the motivation behind the decision.

How to identify interests:

- Ask questions that allow members to hear different perspectives on sensitive issues. For example:
“**Why** do you think (or **not** think) that _____ is the best strategy?”
“**Why** do you agree (or **not** agree) with _____?”
- Realize that there are multiple interests and priorities.
- The most powerful interests are basic human needs: security, economic well being, belonging, recognition, a sense of control over one's life. Ask: “What is your basic concern...?”

Talking about interests:

- To explore interests, ask questions to clarify positions and to make them more specific.
- Acknowledge all interests.
- Try to keep the discussion focused on interests at first, not solutions.