

It is common for conflict to arise during the work of a collaboration or partnership. Conflict is not necessarily bad, but it does require a thoughtful approach to resolve. Below are some tips to help you prepare for, and manage, conflict that may arise in your collaboration or partnership.

Tips for Conflict Management
• Begin negotiating with the points of agreement instead of the points of disagreement.
• Try to make choices available to the parties involved.
• Try to avoid polarizing into separate groups or positions too early in the negotiations.
• Deal with both the content of the conflict and the relationship goals. Remember that the goal in most conflict resolution is twofold—to reach agreement and to enhance the relationship for future communication. Both are equally important.
• Avoid premature voting, giving in too easily, or using chance measure (e.g., flipping a coin) when the issue demands more serious negotiation.
• Avoid speaking in terms of winning and losing. Talk in terms of what is best for the common good (or common vision).
• Sometimes participants in a conflict are too close to the situation to suggest more productive approaches. Know when to suggest or accept outside assistance.
• Be respectful and distinguish between guessing what a particular behavior means and the behavior itself (e.g., Do not assume you know why a partner has been missing meetings.)
• Discriminate about when and how control is to be exercised. A low level of trust is usually generated when people always try to exercise power. Conflicts will likely emerge when trust is low.
• Take responsibility for seeing each viewpoint and role in a conflict. If there is conflict, more than one person has a role in creating and supporting that conflict, even if that role is withdrawal.
• State the goals of a resolution to the conflict in terms that are clear, specific, and achievable.