How We Do Our Work

Our Mission: Empowering communities to create shared solutions

The Institute for Environmental Negotiation (IEN) is a public service organization of the University of Virginia. We have over 30 years experience as facilitators and mediators helping public agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and individuals to make public decisions using a collaborative approach.

How We Do Our Work

Our experience has shown that using collaborative processes can lead to fairer and more creative, inclusive, and effective solutions to public issues. When done well, these processes can develop shared understanding, promote reconciliation, identify creative solutions, build legitimacy for those solutions, broaden networks, and increase social capital.

Our Promise to You

We will always respect the right of members to make their own informed decisions and will never push anyone to agree. We will remain impartial and will take no position on any ideas, proposed agreements, or outcomes that emerge. While our meetings are public, we offer absolute confidentiality for any communication with us outside of meetings, under Virginia Code sections 3705.1(11) and 2.2-4119. And we will facilitate meetings so as to promote openness, inclusion of all perspectives, and respect for your time and efforts.
As public policy facilitators and mediators, we hold ourselves responsible to those who convene and participate in a process, as well as to the general public. We seek to safeguard processes through our commitment to the Ethical Guidance for Environment and Public Policy Section Members developed by the Association for Conflict Resolution:

**Summary of Ethical Principles for EPP Section Members**

1. **Self-Determination:** In designing or conducting a process, a Section member shall strive to let people make their own, informed decisions. A member may encourage people to keep open minds and reconsider their positions, but a member shall not undermine self-determination to achieve consensus or settlement, to satisfy egos, to justify increased fees, or to respond to outside pressures.

2. **Impartiality:** When acting as a neutral (i.e., a facilitator or mediator), a Section member shall be impartial and shall avoid conduct that gives the appearance of partiality. If a member is engaged to act as a neutral and later finds that he or she cannot be impartial, the member shall withdraw from the work.

3. **Conflicts of Interest:** When designing or conducting a process, a Section member shall avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest. Members who know of conflicts or apparent conflicts shall disclose them to clients and participants and shall withdraw from the work if a serious and reasonable objection is raised.

4. **Competence:** A Section member shall take on work only when the member is competent to do the work.

5. **Confidentiality:** When designing or conducting a process, a Section member shall encourage clients and participants to come to an early understanding about confidentiality. A member shall abide by those understandings as well as any laws regarding access to information or keeping of confidences.

6. **Quality of the Process:** When designing or conducting a process, a Section member shall be diligent and attentive to the task; shall encourage broad representation of stakeholders; shall promote the safety, engagement, and competency of the participants; and shall promote mutual respect among all participants.

7. **Advertising and Solicitation:** When seeking work, member shall be open and honest about qualifications, experience, services, and fees. A member shall not promise consensus or imply that the member will conduct a process in violation of these principles. In communicating with potential clients and participants, a member shall respect past clients’ and participants’ reasonable expectations regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

8. **Fees and Other Professional Charges:** When conducting a process, a Section member shall be reasonably candid about who is paying for the member’s services and related expenses. Early in the process, the member shall make participants aware of any fees they may owe.

9. **Advancement of the Practice:** Members shall advance the profession by supporting diversity, access to dispute resolution services, research, education, and mentoring.

10. **Maintaining the Integrity of the Profession:** When designing or conducting a process, a Section member shall place the integrity of the process above personal interest and the interests of the client. In all professional endeavors, a member shall act in ways that demonstrate honesty, trustworthiness, and fitness to serve.

The following guidelines further inform our obligations, values, and standards:

**Best Practices for Government Agencies:**

**Guidelines for Using Collaborative Agreement-Seeking Processes**

and

**IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation**

The full text of all documents referred to in this handout can be accessed at the following URL: http://bit.ly/IENethics