

# UNESCO/APC MULTIMEDIA TRAINING KIT

## *Case studies/examples: Cooperative Problem Solving*

Developed by: Search for Common Ground

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### **Workshop Success Stories**

For more success stories download <http://www.nafcm.org/medleyofmediation.pdf>

A large number of people in a government agency were trained in cooperative problem solving. Here are some of the "success stories" that resulted:

#### ***"How Did You Do That?"***

"A sensitive situation arose involving four female employees and their male manager. I was asked to help them address the problem. Several meetings ensued in which candid discussions were held. Although my expertise in facilitating meetings of this sort is great, I lacked knowledge in developing an agreement based on the interests of the parties.

"Fortunately I was able to attend the workshop one week before our last meeting, and it was just what I needed. The meeting was then held and we were able to apply the tools and techniques of cooperative problem solving. The manager and employees accepted responsibility and accountability for the environment in which they work, and a formal complaint was avoided. On the way out of the meeting, the manager looked at me and said: 'How did you do that?'"

#### ***A Transition Problem***

"In our labor-management negotiations we reached agreement through an interest-based approach. We began with representatives and the union expressing concerns and views as to how to make the transition to the new organization most effective and least disruptive to employees. These goals guided the parties to an understanding and resolution of conflicts".

#### ***From Eight Days To Three Hours***

"Two years ago our labor-management negotiations required eight days, and the agreement was not really acceptable to both parties. Last year, using the cooperative problem solving techniques, a mutually satisfactory agreement was reached in three and a half days. This year, the total process needed just three hours!"

#### ***"There Will Be Conflicts To Be Resolved"***

"Our problem-solving process resulted in a 'win-win' agreement. Both sides attributed our success to our interest-based approach. Recognizing there will be conflicts to be resolved, we anticipate that many will be resolved in this fashion and our communications will be greatly enhanced. Another added benefit is that the process works effectively not only in our work life, but in our personal lives as well."

### ***“It was Amazing to Me”***

“Two groups were not able to reach agreement on sharing work space. Two facilitators were brought in and they began to use an interest-based approach to resolve the problem. Having identified the issues involved, they began to explore the interests of the parties in the room and the various stakeholder groups they represented. The groups then began to brainstorm options that could be used to resolve the problem, keeping in mind that all of the interests were shared by all of them. This concept kept them focused on the need to develop options that they all could live with.

“After the group generated several options, they began to focus on one of the options as a possible solution, and you could feel the energy in the room pick up around that possibility. The group began to work around that option and add things to it to make it work. Everyone was pleased with the approach they followed to arrive at a solution. The meeting was completed in less than two hours.

“One of the participants commented: ‘As we went through the process and came upon options that people could see possibilities in, I saw the parties come together, and that really was literally coming together. I felt the atmosphere of the room change. There was less tension. You saw their heads coming together across the table and them moving towards each other. It was amazing to me.’”

### ***Side-By-Side***

“Two participants in our workshop had been carrying on a feud for quite some time. It had escalated to the point where one of them accused the other of trying to run them down with a car outside of the office. During the workshop, both tried unsuccessfully to convince other participants that the way they had been treating each other was right and acceptable. However, the other participants started pointing out what they were learning in the workshop – they should attack problems, but to respect each other.

“Sometime during the workshop, the two participants started applying the principles of cooperative problem solving. Other participants noticed they were treating each other with more respect. After the workshop was over, one asked the other if she could walk back to the office with her. When they left, they were at least talking with each other and walking side-by-side.”