WHAT IS COLLABORATION?

Collaboration is fundamentally about people working together to address an issue of mutual concern.

What is an issue of mutual concern?

- A shared problem, challenge, or opportunity that brings people together.

- People may not agree about the nature of an issue or what should be done about it. Nevertheless, that issue may mutually affect them or require joint action.

Collaboration *IS*

A pragmatic skill
A way to make conflict productive
Co-creation of innovative solutions
Effective multi-party problem solving
Using interest-based, mutual gains negotiation to address an issue of mutual concern

Collaboration *IS NOT*

Kumbaya! Let's all just get along
Just being nice
Just meeting or talking
The same as public participation
You tell them what to do, or they tell you what to do
Compromise

The ways in which people work together to address the issue of mutual concern can take many forms and may be motivated by varying objectives. Decision making is not always the purpose of collaboration. People may collaborate in order to:

Coordinate actions and plans

Collect data and conduct research

Generate recommendations

Manage an area of land or a resource

Develop policy or regulations

INTERESTS VERSUS POSITIONS

Collaboration is a pragmatic approach that centers on identifying and meeting each party's key *interests*. Unfortunately, people in conflict situations tend to focus on *positions*, sometimes completely losing sight of their interests—and those of other involved parties. Understanding the difference between interests and positions can help parties focus on their and others' key needs and goals and develop creative solutions that meet those interests, rather than getting stuck in a positional impasse.

Interests: the "why"

Things a party needs to satisfy

Goals that a party wants met

What **motivates** parties to seek a solution

Positions: the "what" or "how"

Solutions that parties put forward as a way of meeting their real or perceived interests

Interests vs. Positions:

The Story of the Orange

A man came home and found his two children fighting over the last orange in the house.

"Gimme that! I need it!"

"No way! I need it more!"

Watching his kids roll across the tile, the man took action, cutting the orange in half.

"Look! I've solved your problem. Each of you has half—fair and square."

To his surprise, the kids complained:

"But Dad, I needed all of the juice to give the marinade a rich flavor."

"And I needed all of the rind to balance out the dark chocolate in the muffins!"

The man shook his head. He had focused on their positions (the *what*) rather than learning about and addressing their interests (the *why*). As a result, he wound up offering an inadequate compromise. The better solution was clear: he could have simply asked the children why they wanted the orange, and then peeled the orange and given each kid the part they needed.

Adapted from Massachusetts Institute of Technology "Negotiation Basics"
http://web.mit.edu/negotiation/www/NBivsp.html

Clarifying Interests Through Conversation

A straightforward and effective way to avoid a positional impasse and to work toward interest-based problem solving is to uncover and clarify your and your collaborators' interests. This can often be achieved through conversation, with carefully worded questions and effective listening.

When someone states a position, see it as an opportunity to explore and learn about their interests. Rather than ignoring the comment or countering with your own position, try asking the following questions, which are adapted from the Confluence Center for Mediation and Training's Basic *Plus* Mediation Skills Training:

- "Why is that **important** to you?"

- "What would that solution **accomplish**?"

- "What if that did **happen**?"

- "How would that **affect** you?"

- "How would you **experience** that?"

- "What **changes** would that solution make in your life?"