

How to Facilitate Water Stakeholder Collaboration: A Graduate Student Series

Summary

Graduate students learned and practiced facilitation techniques related to water conflicts in a 6-part summer series. A total of 5 graduate students were trained in 18-hours of facilitation. Through guest speakers, contemporary articles, and reading books on facilitation, graduate students learned about current water conflicts in the state of Colorado, and different methods for facilitating water conflicts.

What Happened?

In these sessions, guest speakers explained the basis for water conflicts and how water conflicts can be solved through litigation, mediation, and facilitation. After gaining the broader picture about water conflicts and how facilitation plays an important role in resolution, graduate students practiced their skills through role-playing different water conflict scenarios. In addition, students selected books related to water, conflicts, and facilitation and then presented the book to the other group members.

Learning Objectives

- Learn about solutions to water conflicts in the CRB through reading articles and books about current events, and listening to guest speakers.
- Learn and practice facilitating scenarios about contemporary water conflicts.
- Use their facilitation skills in community and university events.
- Build relationships with others who are interested in proactively and productively working towards water conflict solutions.

Speakers

- Reagan Waskom - The Director of the Colorado Water Institute presented “Conflict over Water in Colorado: How it Looks from the Perspective of the Director of the Colorado Water Institute.” Dr. Waskom shared his view/experience of the challenges and the opportunities, and then engaged the group in dialogue. He explained that all the easy problems have been solved; the tough problems are remaining. We need facilitation to help tackle wicked problems where there are multiple conflicting criteria for defining solutions and often the solution to one stakeholder is a problem for another stakeholder.
- Joe McMahan - is an attorney and an engineer who works in arbitration, mediation, conflict management, transformation and dispute resolution. He discussed how to approach groups in the assessment and formation stage. He shared his experiences negotiating wicked water conflicts through more thoughtful and efficient approaches.
- David Freeman - Professor Emeritus in the Department of Sociology at Colorado State University introduced a decision tradeoffs technique he developed for use with the US Forest Service in the 1970's and 1980's to help them prepare for negotiations in highly polarized contexts. Dr. Freeman also shared his experience observing and writing about multi-year, multi-state negotiations leading to the Platte River Habitat Recovery Program which led to his book: *Implementing the Endangered Species Act on the Platte Basin Water Commons*.

- Martin Carcasson – Associate Professor in Communication Studies and Director of the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University discussed the Center for Public Deliberation and how they help communities work through wicked problems. He also provided facilitation tips and tricks from his classes on Public Deliberation, and provided graduate students with a copy of *The Center for Public Deliberation Student Associate Training Workbook* (2013).
- MaryLou Smith - Policy and Collaboration Specialist from the Colorado Water Institute, provided real-life examples of water conflicts and how to work through them. She provided examples from her work the past ten-years as a means of highlighting techniques, opportunities and challenges when facilitating collaboration among diverse water stakeholders. Her experiences gave the group an opportunity to practice asking questions and facilitating scenarios.

Applying What they learned

From this experience graduate students have helped facilitate events on campus and in the community

- A graduate student facilitated a session of the Colorado Agricultural Water Alliance, helping them come to consensus about what written comments they would submit as part of the Colorado Water Plan process.
- A graduate student designed a short-course called Students In Dialog about Water for undergraduate students, and facilitated dialogs between students with diverse backgrounds including agriculture and environmental.
- Two graduate students have facilitated conversations about water in agriculture in a sociology course called Water, Society, and Environment

Future

The group will continue to meet and practice their facilitation skills. They have also demonstrated using their skills in the community and in university classrooms.

