



**Turning lemons
into lemonade**

Unit 4 Reframing an Issue Instructor's Guide

Public Conflict Resolution

Through a lecture, role-play and brainstorming discussion the participants will be introduced to the reframing of issues.

Purpose

This session discusses reframing issues to broaden stakeholder involvement and how to bridge interests by reframing.

Objectives

As a result, participants will:

- Learn why it is important to reframe issues.
- Learn how to reframe issues into open-ended questions to be solved.
- Learn to listen to a stakeholder's description of an issue to identify the interests behind their position.

Time

One hour

Materials Needed

Flip Chart and Easel
Markers
Overhead Projector

Handouts

Catamount Island Bridge

Directions

1. Having discussed the differences between positions and interests in Unit 3, the trainer is now ready to discuss the importance of reframing issues in getting from positions to interests. In problem solving, the term reframing refers to directing the parties' attention away from positions toward the task of identifying interests, inventing options for resolving the conflict, and discussing criteria for selecting an option.

Many times it involves using techniques for producing win-win outcomes. One of the most powerful ways of redirecting perspectives is to frame or reframe the initial issue.

2. How an issue is initially framed will greatly affect the parties' problem solving perspectives and level of conflict. Many community issues are initially framed as a debate. Ask the participants to consider the following example in which the parties are forced into a bipolar perspective: "Should we use the budget surplus to clean up the local streams or should we invest that money into developing the downtown business district?" Only positions are revealed by this framing of the issues.
3. Interests must be uncovered in order to reframe the issues to move attention away from the two positions in the above statement. Reframing the issue involves finding a common definition of the issue that is acceptable to all parties. It is achieved by substituting for the initial closed-ended question with an open-ended question. By replacing a "Should we..." question with a "How to..." question, the disputing parties are moved from debating the relative merits of their positions to focusing on an interest-based problem solving venture. By reflecting the key interests of the stakeholders, the reframed issue not only encourages collaboration between all parties; it signals what must be satisfied if the issue is to be resolved.
4. The trainer should ask the participants to try and reframe the statement about how to use the town's budget surplus. If the participants struggle to reframe, suggest the following approach: "How can we use the budget surplus to improve the local streams while investing in downtown businesses?" Such a reframing opens the door for proposals that creatively combine the two interests of cleaning the streams and investing in local businesses. Perhaps the budget surplus could be used to award tax credits to businesses that voluntarily comply with tough stream pollution regulations, or businesses that get directly involved in stream clean-up projects (i.e. Adopt-A-Stream programs).

5. Record the responses on the flip chart as the participants try to reframe the following potentially contentious public issues, which the trainer should write on the flip chart. It is a good idea to have the participants first suggest the interests that are involved in these statements.
 - "Shouldn't we legalize industrial hemp production since the future of tobacco is so uncertain?"
 - "Should we support higher academic standards and achievement for our children by awarding public voucher money to private school students?"
 - "Should we set aside more private land for wilderness preservation in order to protect our local ecosystem?"
 - "Should new commercial hog operations be permitted near our town to improve the local agricultural economy?"
6. The trainer should select two volunteers to read the roles in the "Catamount Island Bridge" role-play. The trainer should read aloud the general information page with the heading "The Setting" before the two characters deliver their parts. After the positions are presented, the participants should collectively brainstorm the interests of the parties. Next, divide into small groups and have the participants reframe the issues. After a few minutes reconvene the whole group and have them offer reframed statements.
7. The trainer should ask if there are any questions about how to reframe. Referring back to the material in Unit 2 about interest-based problem solving may help the trainer answer questions.



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Unit 4
Reframing an Issue
Handouts



Catamount Island Bridge Handout 1

Public Conflict Resolution

A Read-Aloud Role Play

Objective: Catamount Island Bridge is, at first glance, a dispute about the construction of a bridge to an island. The issue is posed as: "Should a new bridge be built to Catamount Island?" But it is really more than that. Listen to two of the disputants, Bonnie (Barney) Baskins and Marvin (Marge) Birdwell as each talks about his or her position on the issue. Identify the interests behind each position. Based on the interests that you hear, reframe the issue to find a common definition of the issue that is acceptable to all parties.

Procedure: The role play has three parts: the setting and two roles. All participants read the setting silently to themselves (or the setting can be read aloud, one paragraph at a time by several volunteers). Two volunteers then read each role play aloud, in turn, to the rest of the group. The instructor asks the participants to listen for two things: the positions of each disputant, and the interests behind those positions. Participants are encouraged to take notes.

When the role players finish, the instructor starts with one of the roles and asks the whole group to identify the disputant's position. This is recorded on a flip chart. Next, the instructor asks the participants to list the interests they heard. Responses are also recorded on the flip chart. The instructor may have to remind the participants that interests are the reasons why the individual holds a particular position. When all the responses are recorded, the instructor again reminds participants of the definition of interests. The list is then reviewed and items not identified as interests are removed. The procedure is repeated for the second disputant.

After the interests are tabulated for both disputants, the instructor divides the group into teams of 4-5. Each team works independently to create a reframing statement. The statements are shared with the rest of the group and discussed.

Time Needed: 45 minutes

Equipment: 2 flip charts and markers

Unit IV Handout: Catamount Island Bridge

Catamount Island Bridge

Public Information

This information should be distributed to everyone.

The Setting

The Town of Catamount Island is a resort community on the mid-Atlantic coast. Despite its misleading name, the town consists of both an island and a mainland area. Connecting the two parts of the town is a single lane, swing-span "pontoon" bridge. The bridge spans the Intracoastal Waterway, a major route for pleasure craft and small commercial boats that ply the coast. It also bisects a high quality estuarine wetland, and is the only means available for crossing to and from the island.

The island and much of the mainland property was owned by a developer who purchased the land 40 years ago for less than \$8,000. Since the 1980's, residential development has boomed at Catamount Island. Both the island and mainland sections of town have undergone considerable growth. Ocean-front lots which originally sold for \$600 in the early 1960's now fetch upwards of \$500,000. The developer has since passed away, but his son, Cal Fiore, inherited the undeveloped lots, including the wetland area. Cal also serves on the Town Council. Cal wants to see the bridge that his father built in the 1950's replaced by a modern structure.

Catamount Island bridge is actually a floating barge that swings open to allow traffic on the Intracoastal Waterway to pass. The State acquired the bridge from Cal's father in the 1960's. The State Department of Transportation (DOT) maintains the bridge and staffs it with a bridge operator 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The bridge opens on demand for commercial traffic, and on the hour for everyone else.

The DOT has sought to replace the bridge with a new structure for the past 20 years, noting concerns over safe and efficient transportation. It takes about ten minutes to open and close the bridge, and can usually handle normal, off-season traffic from the 270 mainland residents and the 250 island residents. However, during peak summer days when the average daily traffic over the bridge is about 10,000 cars and the Town population swells to 8,800, routine openings and closing can cause seemingly endless traffic delays. The bridge has also broken down on occasion, posing long delays for people wishing to leave the island. Although the Town employs both a fire department and an emergency medical service crew, no services exist on the island side of the bridge.

According to DOT engineers, there are two alternatives to the current bridge. The first is a high-rise fixed span structure. The high-rise would require drainage of Blaine Creek, and relocation of Big Narrows Channel. Nine acres of wetlands would be filled in. The second option is a mid-level draw bridge. This option involves less environmental damage only 3 acres of wetlands would be sacrificed, but requires a bridge operator. DOT's preferred option is the high rise.

The bridge issue has split the town. Many on the mainland, including the mayor, Bonnie (Barney) Baskins, believe that a high-rise bridge is necessary to unite the two areas. Most island residents, represented by Marvin (Marge) Birdwell of the Catamount Island Citizens Association, like the pontoon bridge and want to keep it. At worst, they'd settle for the mid-rise option.

Catamount Island Bridge

Instructions for role player: Do not read this script aloud, or let other role-play participants read it. Try to play the role in a way that is natural to you.

Bonnie (Barney) Baskins, Catamount Island Mayor

I am Bonnie (Barney) Baskins, the mayor of Catamount Island. I am concerned about the limited access to the island part of town. As mayor, I oversee management of Town services on both island and mainland. The old bridge is a major impediment to the provision of efficient and effective services. We need a new bridge. In fact, of the two bridge options, the only one that makes sense is the high-level span.

The high-level span will save taxpayers money. Can you imagine how expensive it would be to keep someone employed 24 hours a day to continue to operate a draw bridge? No, the state doesn't need to be spending money like that.

I really care about the safety of our school children. I have two children in our school system. The old bridge structure is a hazard to our school children. School buses have been stranded on the island for long periods while the bridge is open for commercial traffic. What if something happened to one of those children while the bridge is open and they can't get across? Also, on many, many occasions, children are late for school because the buses are stranded on the island while the bridge is open.

One of my worst fears is that a major catastrophe could occur on the island at a time that fire and ambulance services are blocked from crossing. All we could do in that case would be to wait. Someone could die needlessly. Also, because of our town's growth, we need to buy a larger fire truck. But a larger truck won't be able to get across that bridge! We won't be able to trade in our older truck for a newer one. Without a new bridge, we'll have to own a smaller truck at the expense of our tax payers.

I feel that a good bridge would unite the community. I'm a resident of the mainland. I see the island as an isolated enclave where mainlanders hardly venture, and in fact, we are unwelcome. By enabling easier access, I see opportunities for the island and mainland parts of town to begin to act like one town, not two.

The Catamount Island Citizens Association say they are concerned about the environment. If they are so concerned, why don't they want to do something about the pollution caused by all the boats that have to wait in the channel for the bridge to open? I have seen more than 20 boats at one time backed up waiting to cross. Every one of those boats was running its engines. You could smell the diesel fumes for miles. And you can bet that when their toilets were full, they were dumping those things right in the channel... not twenty yards from peoples' front yards!

Most of those people in the Citizens Association are just complainers, really. They have their little piece of heaven and want to deny it to anyone else. Why, Marvin (Marge) Birdwell even fought the development of the Food Town grocery on the west end of town. Before we had the Food Town store, we had to travel 15 miles to buy groceries. And you know what? I saw Marvin (Marge) buying groceries at the Food Town last week.

Catamount Island Bridge

Instructions for role player: Do not read this script aloud, or let other role-play participants read it. Try to play the role in a way that is natural to you.

Marvin (Marge) Birdwell, Catamount Island Citizens Association

I'm Marvin (Marge) Birdwell, a member of the Catamount Island Citizens Association, a group of island homeowners. We created the CICA as a way to respond to many of the threats facing our island, largely as a result of development pressures. I am firmly opposed to the development of a high-rise span.

The biggest problem is that bridge construction would destroy estuarine wetlands on the west side of the island. To build such a massive bridge, DOT will have to drain and fill in over nine acres of wetland. Coastal wetlands are the breeding grounds for shrimp and other fish species that our commercial fishermen depend on for their livelihoods. I am just not willing to sacrifice another acre of wetland for one of DOT's grandiose public works projects!

This island is a special place. The large wetlands on the west end are a refuge for wildlife as well as for the soul. Did you know that this barrier island is unique in that it is actually gaining rather than losing its beach? We have too much at stake to allow developers to plunder.

DOT has been dishonest in its representation of the facts. We proved that in court eight years ago when we stopped the bridge the first time. The judge agreed with us that their finding of no significant impact from the proposed structure was balderdash. So now they have to undergo a full-fledged environmental impact study. But still, they are playing fast with the facts. Do you think that the impacts will be any less severe than they were a decade ago? Absolutely not!

Right now, the island's west side is largely undeveloped. As it should be. Cal Fiore would love to sell those lots, but they won't perk. They're too wet. He knows as well as we do that those west side lots are part of the overall wetland ecosystem. If they get that bridge, you bet you'll see a sewer line connected to that span. Once sewer is in, this island will be no different from every other barrier island along this coast a barren strip of sand stacked end to end with houses, condominiums, and bikini shops.

The mayor and her (his) friends are pushing for development. I've seen a lot of people around here get rich as land prices have spiraled in the past 15 years. But we have too much of a good thing here. Let's not spoil it! We can't keep building and developing without suffering from the damage it is causing. Sure, we can push for strict zoning to protect the "sense of place" that this island provides. But I don't trust the folks in city hall. Any protection policy that can be constructed can just as easily be dismantled.

Look, I'm a realist. I know that we'll eventually have to update the pontoon bridge. The shipping and boating interests are just too strong to hold off forever. But we don't need a high rise span. In fact the mid-level draw bridge proposal that DOT is touting could be scaled back considerably. The tall-masted sail boats would still have to wait for the bridge opening, but most other craft would be able to get through. In fact, most of those pleasure boaters would be happy to trade an hour-long wait for the preservation of pristine wetlands.