

Convening: The Legislator's Powerful Role

Policy Consensus Initiative

NCSL Legislative Effectiveness Committee

State-Tribal Institute

Women's Legislative Network

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POLICY CONSENSUS INITIATIVE

CONVENING: THE LEGISLATOR'S POWERFUL ROLE

PCI defines “convening” as:

Leaders engaging with all sectors—public, private, non-profit, citizens, and others—to develop effective, lasting solutions to public problems that go beyond what any sector could achieve on its own.

Collaborative Governance

Traditional Governance

Place



Neutral forum



Hearing room

Leader



Convener



Decision maker

Rules of Engagement



Public solutions system



Roberts Rules/ Masons Guide

Sponsor



Public / private / not-for-profit



Government

Solution



Integrated, public, private, civic agreements and investments to take action



Decisions by government bodies

WHAT RESULTS DOES CONVENING A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS PRODUCE?

- **Lasting** — Solutions developed through collaborative governance won't simply be undone in the next year or legislative session.
- **Effective** — The collaborative governance approach ensures that the realities of the situation are considered and discussed; decisions are not made in a vacuum.
- **More buy-in** — From the outset, all with a stake are involved in authentic ways; all have a role in the final agreement.

WHY IS CONVENING A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS NECESSARY?

- **Fragmentation of government organizations and programs stands in the way of solutions**
- **Overlapping institutions and jurisdictions mean that many levels of government along with other sectors need to be involved**
- **Increasing complexity of opportunities and issues**
- **A need to integrate policies, programs, and resources to address the problem or issue**
- **Opportunities emerge and people are ready to work together on a common issue**

WHEN TO USE THE ROLE OF CONVENER

- The issues are of high priority and a decision is needed.
- The issues are identifiable and negotiable.
- The interests are identifiable and it is possible to find representatives for them.
- The outcome is genuinely in doubt.
- There is enough time and resources.
- Time is needed for building consensus among conflicting interests, and resources are necessary to support the process.
- The political climate is favorable. In the political context, leadership support and timing are critical to determining whether to go forward.
- A problem or opportunity presents itself that several government agencies, jurisdictions and sectors are required to solve.

WHEN TO USE THE ROLE OF CONVENER: TWO APPROACHES

*in the beginning. . .***proactive**

when an issue is known to be contentious, getting involvement of stakeholders can help to manage inevitable conflicts and build consensus on ways to address issues.

*after the fall . . .***reactive**

when a contentious issue has already developed into a dispute or impasse, a mediated process can be used prior to turning to litigation.



UPSTREAM

DOWNSTREAM

KEYS TO CONVENING

- **Be inclusive.** Engage a wide variety of people from different perspectives. If important players are left out, results developed by the group will be suspect.
- **Meet in a neutral place.** The place needs to ensure an impartial process. When the issue is complex and divisive, get assistance from an experienced facilitator to plan and conduct the process.
- **Be impartial.** In order to keep people participating, a convener should not favor one side or another, but rather try to find a solution all sides can embrace. If people think a convener is taking sides, they won't stay with the process.
- **Establish the purpose for the process.** Work with participants to frame the issues to open the way for discussion and problem solving.
- **Direct, rather than dominate, the discussions.** Enable people to talk with each other, rather than talk only to you. You may want to get someone else to facilitate the discussions so you can listen and ask questions
- **Keep people moving.** Help keep participants focused and working together when their differences threaten to drive them apart.
- **Demonstrate visible commitment.** Even if you can't be present at every meeting, send signals of your on-going interest and provide feedback on the group's progress.
- **Finally, make sure there's an outcome.** The best outcomes involve concrete results.

PRINCIPLES OF CONVENING

To be effective as a convener, a leader needs to follow these principles:

Transparency and Accountability

Decisions take place in the public eye.

Equity and Inclusiveness

All interests who are needed and willing contribute to solution.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Solutions are tested to make sure they make practical sense.

Responsiveness

Public concerns are authentically addressed.

Forum Neutrality

Different perspectives are welcome; the process itself has no bias.

Consensus-Based

Decisions are made through consensus rather than majority rule.

A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS relies on a network that provides these essential linkages:

- **Sponsor** – An agency, foundation, civic organization, public-private coalition, etc. to initiate and provide support
- **Convener** – A governor, legislator, mayor, local official, respected civic leader, etc. with power to bring diverse people together to work on common problems
- **Neutral Forum** – An impartial organization or venue, etc. to provide and ensure skilled process management
- **Participants** – All sectors (public, private, civic) and levels of government are involved to ensure representation of all interests and points of view

LEADERS' STEPS TO SOLUTIONS: BEFORE CONVENING

1. Identify and raise an **issue** in the community
2. Identify skilled staff from a **neutral forum** to assist
3. **Assess** the feasibility of collaboration and who needs to be involved and how to engage them
4. **Convene** all needed participants

LEADERS' STEPS TO SOLUTIONS: DURING CONVENING

5. Participants jointly agree to **objectives** and **ground rules** for working together
6. Conveners and participants work together to **frame the issues** to be resolved
7. Conveners and participants develop **agreements** that **integrate** interests and resources

LEADERS' STEPS TO SOLUTIONS: AFTER CONVENING

8. Conveners and participants **implement** their **agreements** together