Facilitating Collaborative Public Decisions: A Video-Based Training Tool User Guide

This document includes:
1. **An introduction to the site**
2. **Suggested uses for the site**
3. **An overview of the site's features and navigation**

Welcome to the Site

Purpose of the Tool

Whether you are a stakeholder, facilitator, agency official, or student, this tool can help you understand and facilitate real-world public decision making processes. Using multimedia examples drawn from the California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative, the tool enables users to explore strategies for facilitating the different stages of collaborative decision making. This tool was created to help a variety of users expand their expertise and increase their understanding of facilitation strategies, challenges, and steps in a collaborative process. The MLPA is a formal process that was large is scope and scale. However, these concepts are useful regardless of scale and can be applied to settings ranging from small, informal gatherings to multi-stakeholder processes.

The Importance of Collaborative Decision-making

Collaborative decision-making has developed as a way to reconcile conflicting interests and deal with complex technical information that can otherwise lead to impasse. Traditional public decision making approaches—including courtrooms, administrative procedures and legislative processes—often do not adequately address complex issues that cut across boundaries. As an alternative, collaborative approaches bring together affected people and organizations to work through the scientific and values-based dimensions of a choice. This process enables parties to build understanding, generate creative solutions and foster buy-in. These approaches can produce durable agreements that solve underlying problems so that we do not have to keep revisiting the same decisions over and over again.

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative as a Process Example

This website draws examples from the *California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative,* a ten-year long collaborative process that established a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in California state waters, as required by the 1999 California Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA). Funded by more than $35 million in public and philanthropic dollars, the effort involved an extensive staff team supplemented by contracted professional facilitators to design the process and run thousands of hours of meetings. Due to California open meetings laws and the desire to ensure transparency of the process, most meetings were recorded by AGP Video, Inc. and archived on the CAL-SPAN Internet distribution network. The recordings provide an unparalleled record of a complex, science-intensive and conflict-laden process, and the ways that the managers of the process worked to ensure its effectiveness and productivity.

We use these videos of actual meetings to demonstrate how professional facilitators organize a process and navigate difficult situations. While the substance covered in the meetings is rich, the focus of this site is on illustrating the flow and components of a collaborative process and highlighting techniques and strategies for structuring a collaborative process. The MLPA process involved a series of meetings in each of four regions. Examples are drawn from all regions to illustrate relevant content. The site is not a chronological series of events of one process, rather it is a patchwork of examples from separate, but related, meeting series.

Suggested Use

Facilitators and mediators use a range of strategies to create a structure and process that deal effectively with the complicated dimensions of problem solving. In this tool, we explore some of these strategies, and describe them within stages of a stepwise problem solving process. Video clips from real processes are used to illustrate strategies. The tool's navigation arrows allow the user to follow the flow of a collaborative process from start to finish. Collaborative decision making is an adaptive process however and often the process is not as linear as the navigation bar suggests. Users can also focus directly on topics of interest by using the navigation bar at the top of the page.

Individual Use
This site can be worked through on your own in detail from start to finish for an immersive exploration of what the flow of a collaborative process might look like. You can start and stop at the site at any time. Alternatively, you can pick a topic that interests you and focus on a single video or topic area that is relevant to your needs.

As a Training Tool
This site can also be used as a teaching tool for instructors—of current practitioners in skills building workshops or students new to mediation—to supplement class discussions and simulations. The "Welcome" section outlines the stages of a collaborative process and provides a framework to contextualize the content of the site. Topical sections can be assigned for out of class viewing, or videos can be played in a classroom setting to illustrate a point. There is an option available in the Topic Map to display a number for each subtopic to aid in quick reference when discussing concepts as a group or for directing class attention to a particular topic.

Site Layout

The **Navigation Bar** at the top of the page shows the layout of the site.

Broad process components or **Stages** are represented as large circles. These are always visible on the navigation bar.

Understanding Issues, Interests & Options

Once participants and facilitators have introduced themselves and the group has clearly defined the structure, goals and expectations for the process, it is time to move on to the substantive work of exploring avenues for reaching agreement. To begin this work, a group should identify the full range of
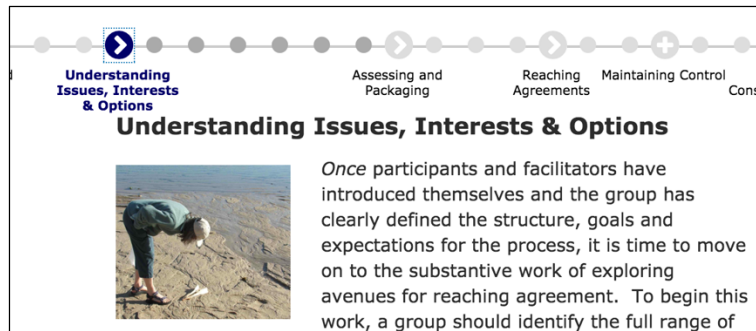
Circles with *arrows* inside them represent the parts of the site that demonstrate illustrate what the flow of a collaborative process might look like. Circles with *plus signs* in them are additional content that is important to know, but does not fit chronologically into a process flow.
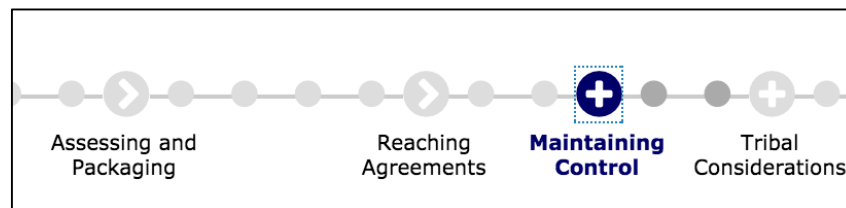
The small circles are **Topics** that are organized under the stages of the process where they typically occur. Use the mouse to hover over these smaller circles to see the topic titles displayed. Click on any pearl to navigate directly to the content. The Topic and Stage you are in will be highlighted in dark blue.
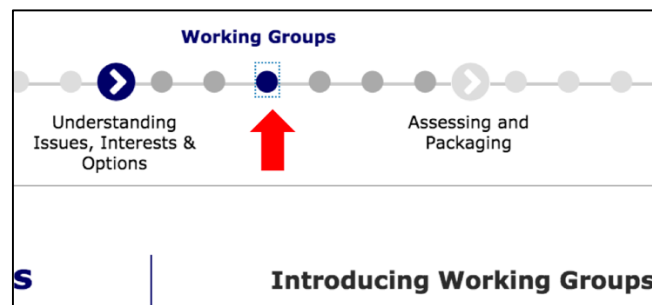
Subtopics are components within each Topic area that are specific issues or skills that are demonstrated with video clips. Click through the small blue circles at the top of the page to advance the videos, or click the arrows, forward or back, that are on either side of the video.

The language on the left side of the screen is consistent for each Topic and does not change as you click through Subtopics.

 [*explain clip numbering if we do it*]

Site Tools

The **Topic Map** is located in the top right of the site page.

The Topic Map opens to the right of the site content when selected. You can select a box to keep this open whenever you load the reopen the site. The box is adjustable and you can resize it as you choose. The Topic Map displays a list of all Stages, Topics, and Subtopics in the site. Clicking on a Topic Map item navigates you directly to the selected content.

There is also an option to select the "show topic numbers" box at the top of the Topic Map to display a unique number next to each subtopic title in the site and on the Topic Map for easy reference.

The **Glossary** is located just above the Topic Map in the top right of the site. Clicking on the Glossary opens a comprehensive glossary page of key terms used in the site. Additionally, in the text of the site, there are dotted underlined terms that are defined in the Glossary. Hovering over an underlined term displays a text box with a description of the term or concept.

At points throughout the site, resources that are relevant to a specific topic may be linked to directly. All of these resources have also been gathered in a **To Learn More** page at the end of the site. This page also contains content that may be of interest for those wanting to know more about the MLPA process, collaborative process organization, or other relevant resources.