

**Conflict Management**

As in any relationship, if you identify and work through grievances early you will help to avoid the strained emotions that become harder to resolve as time passes. You should assume from the beginning that there will always be issues to resolve; it is a natural element of all partnerships. Your best plan is to prepare for them. Your worst plan is to hope they will not happen.

In the partnership documentation, plan for how issues will be resolved. In many cases this means considering third party mediation for more formal grievance procedures or when decisions cannot be reached. This does not always mean lawyers, but rather neutral parties trusted by all the partners who can try play an “honest broker” role. The cost is usually divided equally between the parties.

**Advice from** [***The Partnering Toolbook***](https://www.conservationtraining.org/file.php/73/library/section_4/assets/PartneringToolbookEng.pdf) (2003, p. 21)

The challenge for partners is to see a *break-down* as an opportunity for a *break-through*.

Even when you have planned for them in your partnership agreement, serious grievances may still arise. Try to use them as an opportunity for honest dialogue and for constructive analysis of partnership dynamics.

You can help prevent grievances by ensuring that partners:

* **Provide full access to information** to each other about the project on a regular basis.
* **Establish mutual accountability** so that both partners have rights and obligations and both partners recognize that information exchange about what is working and not working is critical for project success.
* **Incorporate agreed upon indicators of mutual trust and respect** that can be used as touchstones to help determine if there are potential problems on the horizon. If you have articulated shared values that include the importance of transparency and addressing issues honestly, it will be easier to bring issues to the table.
* **Model forthright communications behavior** by bringing problem areas to light before they become conflicts, using clear and straightforward language.
* **Listen actively**. Be sure that you listen and acknowledge the issue as seen by the other party. A partner’s anger over a perceived grievance is often dissipated by being heard, and it helps in cross-cultural relations to ensure greater understanding of how different parties can perceive the same action or statement.

Conflict management tools and skills will help you navigate these stressful situations. If you want to develop your conflict management skills, you can search “conflict management” in the “learning tools” section of this resource center.

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