

Managing Polarization in Public Consultation

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A professional communicator for 35 years, Eric Bergman has long been passionate about helping his clients communicate effectively.

He has been self-employed as a communication consultant since 1985 and, for the past 25 years, has provided presentation skills, public speaking and media training to clients in North America, South America, Europe and Asia. His approach to managing polarization has helped dozens of individuals and organizations work through difficult issues to achieve win-win outcomes

Session Description:

Participants will be introduced to The Polarization Model. This tool provides a strategic perspective for understanding, tracking and effectively managing polarization, including insight into using openly hostile views to move opinions to a more positive perspective, the greater good.

Next, the session discusses trust as an important catalyst to managing issues effectively, and draws a clear line to the equally important concept of transparency. Participants will be introduced to a novel working definition of transparency: "Ask me anything."

Finally, the session outlines the value--and the difficulty--of answering questions to enhance communication and transparency, and to effectively manage polarization.

Outline of the session:

Activity	Time Allotment	Description
Introduction	10%	This segment will clearly explain the direction of the workshop to participants and the potential learning outcomes: provide them with insights, strategies and tools they can apply to the challenge of managing polarization within public consultation processes.
The Polarization Model	30%	<p>Participants will be introduced to The Polarization Model, which tracks a spectrum of opinion from openly hostile on one end to openly supportive on the other, with "no opinion" somewhere in the middle.</p> <p>Using a case generated by the audience, the model will highlight the possibility of using the openly hostile end of the spectrum to move opinion toward the greater good.</p>

Bridging Truth and Transparency	25%	This segment uses short video clips and audience interaction to bridge the gap that sometimes exists between truth and transparency. It will define a number of terms--truth, lies, deception and spin--as a means of ensuring that spin doesn't turn to sin--with a potential loss of trust.
The Secret Ingredient	25%	This segment uses examples, games and audience participation to illustrate the value of answering questions clearly, concisely and effectively is the catalyst that improves communication, enhances transparency and manages polarization to better achieve the greater good through public participation.
Conclusion	10%	<p>This segment recaps the main points and restates the call to action. It also brings the discussion back to the theme of the conference.</p> <p>This session is highly interactive; questions will be encouraged throughout. Final questions will be answered at the end.</p>

Brief description of how your session addresses the theme of the 2017 Conference:

Pursuing the greater good can mean overcoming the vocal objections of the few to benefit the many. This workshop provides insight into achieving that end state.

Session learning objective (s):

Participants will better understand how and why polarization arises as a result of issues, which are unresolved problems that have the potential of escalating into a dispute.

They will understand how to apply The Polarization Model to the challenge of finding common ground with communities and managing real or perceived hostility.

They will gain fresh insight into the twin concepts of trust and transparency, and better understand how answering questions is the glue that binds the two together.