

# Stakeholder Processes

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how conflict resolution processes can be used to make decisions around public policy. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Goals of the Stakeholder Process
2. The Stakeholder Process in Action

## 1. Goals of the Stakeholder Process

When conflict resolution processes are used to make **decisions** around public policy, these decisions are often quite complex and involve multiple parties.

**Stakeholder** processes are used for these types of situations, with stakeholders being anyone who would be **directly impacted by the decision** made, or course of action taken.

The **stakeholder process** seeks to get input from these stakeholders by bringing all of the parties together to try to reach a consensus.

This is typically a longer process because the issues being discussed are more complex; the success of the process really depends on identifying all the parties involved and including them at the table.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Decision

Selection of a course of action.

### Stakeholder

In stakeholder processes, anyone who will be directly impacted by a decision and whose input is sought for reaching consensus on that decision.

### Direct Impact of Decision

The results of a selected action on given individuals.

### Stakeholder Process

A conflict resolution decision making process in which consensus is sought on a decision from all persons directly affected by the decision.

## 2. The Stakeholder Process in Action

Because of the conflict's complexity, there will be probably be a conflict analysis done up front by an intervener to collect information from the parties, but the rest of the stakeholder process is the same as a typical conflict resolution process.

### *Step 1: Identifying the Parties*

There may be multiple parties, so this first step involves bringing those parties to the table and asking any other identified parties to join.

### *Step 2 Setting Ground Rules*

Once the parties meet, which may be after a conflict analysis, the intervener should let the parties set ground rules for how they want to proceed.

### *Step 3: Identifying Interests*

This is where the intervener helps identify the interests of the various groups affected by this particular public policy. This step can take some time, particularly if there are multiple parties.

### *Step 4: Brainstorming Solutions*

In this step, the parties generate any possible solutions that are available to them and would satisfy the mutual needs and interests of all the parties.

### *Step 5: Evaluating Solutions*

Finally, the last step involves determining the feasibility and desirability of the solutions generated in the previous step, and trying to get consensus or buy-in.

If there's not consensus, the parties may need to return to an earlier step, such as identifying interests and concerns, or brainstorming more solutions. The stakeholder process is iterative much like a typical conflict resolution process.

### **IN CONTEXT**

How does the stakeholder process work in real life? Quite recently, this occurred in the state of Minnesota over the St. Croix Bridge. In particular, there was a longstanding conflict about replacing the 90-year-old Stillwater Lift Bridge to make the flow of traffic between Stillwater, Minnesota and Hudson, Wisconsin easier, safer, and more effective.

The conflict was complex and involved multiple parties, so the parties held a stakeholder process as part of the resolution. The main issues in the conflict involved transportation, historic preservation, and a number of environmental questions. The resolution process brought together federal and state agencies, local governments, and nine public interest groups.

This initial stakeholder process started in 2003, and went through 2006. The result was that they finally decided to build the bridge. However, later court rulings delayed the finality of the resolution, and stakeholders were brought back to restart the process. Stakeholder advocacy and petitions

helped bring in federal approval to get the bridge replaced. Construction started in 2014 and was finalized with the bridge opening in 2017.



## BIG IDEA

The stakeholder process is really the same as any conflict resolution process in terms of the steps involved. The difference is that the stakeholder process often takes much longer because of the complexity of the conflict and the number of parties involved.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the stakeholder process is a type of conflict resolution that deals with disagreements over public policies. Like any conflict resolution process, the **goals of the stakeholder process** are to bring the parties together and allow them all to contribute toward a solution; the desired result is a consensus among the parties.

You now understand **what the stakeholder process looks like in action**: The steps include identifying the parties, setting ground rules, identifying interests, brainstorming solutions, and evaluating solutions. While the steps are the same as they are in other conflict resolution processes, the difference is that stakeholder processes can take much longer because the conflict is often complex, with multiple parties involved. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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