



Farmers Market Conflict Resolution Training Guide



This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under subaward ENE22-176.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A. Overview

This Guide was developed after the completion of the 3-year project *Reducing Tensions on Market Day: Training Farmers' Market Organizers and Service Providers on Conflict Resolution and De-escalation Strategies*, funded by Northeast SARE.

The idea of the project began at the 2020 Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets annual conference. MFFM Director Jimmy DeBiasi asked mediators Karen Groat and Leslie Forstadt to host a workshop focusing on conflict resolution strategies for farmers' markets.

It focuses on professional development training for market organizers, market members, volunteers around conflict resolution strategies and resources specifically tailored for farmers market day issues.

This guide is designed to be utilized as a series of online Communities of Practice (CoP) convenings. This method was chosen because the original project worked best for Maine and Vermont market operators who had varied schedules of market operators.

The three-year Maine/Vermont series was held over a 3-month period during farmers markets "off-season" months (winter /early spring). The state leaders for each state invited up to 6 markets, taking variables in account around market operation (small v large; paid manager vs unpaid; member-run vs board-run) to ensure a wide yet synchronistic grouping. Market attendees were required to sign a commitment for two members of each market to attend all meetings (i.e. board, vendor, and/or paid market manager where applicable) and in implementing action steps. A stipend was paid to the market for their team's participation.

B. Structure

The CoP held seven meetings for each year's cohort.

One Orientation meeting:

Make sure all attendees are comfortable with the software used for the meetings, establish community agreements, share the outline of schedule, and introduce everyone.

Three Skills meetings: Designed and led by professional mediators and facilitated by state leaders. Focused on individual professional development exercises and discussion to understand why conflict happens and how individuals respond to the conflict.

Three Systems meetings: Designed and led by experienced market leaders and national farmers market leaders and facilitated by state leaders. Focused on exercises and discussions to ensure the market's rules, roles, and enforcement are clearly and fairly defined in writing.

The Skills and Systems Teams alternated their monthly meetings, with Skills leading off the CoP.

Workshop/Community of Practice Outlines

[Orientation slides](#)

Session 1

- [Skills Session 1](#)
- [Systems Session 1 outline](#)

[Feedback Survey](#) after each cohort (Using Google Form allows for the same form to feed into a single excel spreadsheet.)

Session 2

- [Skills Session 2](#)
- [Systems Session 2](#)

Session 3

- [Skills Session 3](#)

Systems Session 3 is open-ended discussion and driven by the participants.




Resources For Community of Practice

Agricultural Mediation Overview

- 1) **Check out Ag Mediation Resources**
 - a) [Maine Ag Mediation](#)
 - b) [VT Ag Mediation](#)

Resources for the Project




Resources used during our meetings

- A. [Power Dynamics Worksheet](#)
- B. [Conflict Mapping Exercise](#)
- C. [Conflict Type](#)
- D. [4 Chairs](#)
- E.  [I-messages-handout.pdf](#)
- F. Community Agreements
- G. [Active Listening Tips](#)
- H. [Market day Role Chart](#)
- I. [Conflict Concept Map](#) - mapping conflicts upstream
- J.  [SARE Feedback Handout word.docx](#)
- K.  [SARE Feedback Practice word.docx](#)
- L. [Market Orientation Sample from Orono FM](#)
- M. [Social Media](#) - how to handle negative responses
- N. [Weather Cancellation policy](#)
- O. [Phone Tree](#) - for inclement weather and other needed comm's
- P. [Slide Deck for Session 1](#) Systems Building

Reference Docs (examples & model language for roles & rules):

- Example from some Maine markets
 - [Bangor Application \(volunteer list\)](#) within app
 - [Bangor](#) – bylaws for job descriptions
 - [Portland](#) bylaws for job descriptions
 - [Orono](#) bylaws for job descriptions
- Examples from other markets:
 - [Columbia, MO](#) – job descriptions (p.13 of the document)
 - [Halifax, NS](#) – Compliance and Conflict Resolution part (p.9 of doc)
 - [Olympia, WA](#) – Conflict Resolution procedures

Case Studies

-  Case Study 1 - Addressing Long-Standing Rule Violations
-  Case Study 2: Vendor Conduct and Market Safety Conflict
-  Case Study 3

Feedback from Market Teams:

What do you think you may implement or change at your market, based on this CoP? You can skip this question if you don't have an answer.

That maybe more active listening needs to happen in board meetings when conflict arises.

A better thought process before I respond.

Active listening is something I would like to model and practice with our membership. It really helps to get clear understanding of situations.

Development of org chart and Mission Statement

We will create a mission statement this season to help vendors consider their why and if it aligns with the mission of the market as a whole

Help vendors become engaged with the market more.

Tighter adherence to the market rules in regards to the vendors not complying. Sharing responsibilities will be on our menu for this season too.

I want to at the least recognize, appreciate, and continue the current climate of trust and reliability in policy and decision making. I will make sure people have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities as this has clear benefit to relationships and work accomplished.

Going back through our rules and making our communication and cancellation policies much more clear. Also a more clear "buy in" policy.

I definitely feel more confident in addressing issues as this CoP has introduced tools to manage conflicts with care and respect. I am asking that all our Board meetings begin with the guidelines for engagement decided on by the group. I also am urging the Board to create a protocol for hearing general member voices during Board meetings.

I think we will use the suggestions for improving meetings- have

a 'parking lot', agreeing to 'meeting rules', and timekeeper to keep meetings on track

We are going to add a grievance form to our website, along with draft rules about how timely we need to deal with submission and how decisions are made around those submissions.

We are working on creating a code of conduct for our market

Rules, code of conduct and communication focus

New grievance & orientation forms, policies to support those

We knew that our rules/bylaws needed to be added to and refreshed, which we had done before our applications were sent out for this upcoming year. What I was hearing from other markets and would like to incorporate into our market is a grievance form for our vendors.

enforcement of the rules.

Understanding how to manage conflict, have uncomfortable conversations

Project Team

- **Jimmy DeBiasi**, Director of Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets
- **Andrew Graham**, Coordinator of the VT Farmers Market Association
- **Hanne Tierney**, Owner of Cornerstone Farm, 20+ years of market organizing in Maine
- **Darlene Wolnik**, Farmers Market Support Program Director, Farmers Market Coalition
- **Karen Groat**, professional mediator and conflict coach
- **Leslie Forstadt**, Human Development Specialist and Extension Professor at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- **Leah Boyd**, professional mediator, group facilitator, and communication skills trainer