Consensus Building Encyclopedia Article

Consensus Building

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Contents

Consensus Building Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Consensus Building.....3

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Consensus building addresses conflict by helping disputants themselves decide the process and the outcome. It involves a number of collaborative decision-making techniques and an impartial facilitator or mediator is often used to assist diverse or competing interest groups to reach agreement on policy matters, environmental conflicts, or other issues in controversy affecting a large number of people. The processes include negotiation, facilitation, **mediation**, and regulatory negotiation (including public policy negotiation). Consensus building processes are typically used to foster dialogue, clarify areas of agreement and disagreement, improve the information on which a decision may be based, and resolve controversial issues in ways that all interests find acceptable. The goal is to produce sound policies or agreements with a wide range of support while reducing the likelihood of subsequent disagreements or legal challenges. Disputes over the interpretation or application of rules may be resolved through consensual or **adjudicative** means, and in some cases through coercion or force by legislation. Adjudicative dispute resolution means that a third party makes a binding decision for the parties. Adjudicative approaches include arbitration and court adjudication. Legislative approaches to dispute resolution focus on rule-making by a group, organization, formal legislative body, or ruler.

Internet Resource

U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution Web site. Available from http://www.ecr.gov.