



COLLABORATIVE INFORMED CONSENT[®]

A Public Engagement and Communications Model

What It Is, Why, When, and How To Use It!

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Welcome

This e-book is a guide. It will help you understand how and why we use the Collaborative Informed Consent ® (CIC) resilient and successful communication and stakeholder engagement model with our clients nationwide.

The model helps prevent community and communications crises, which can result in public outrage and possible litigation while developing workable and sustainable relationships, enhancing professional and personal connections, and enriching reputations with our regulators and community stakeholders.

The collaborative informed consent approach has been refined over the past 50-years by L. Darryl and Kay Armstrong at ARMSTRONG and Associates. The process outlined assists us in developing meaningful, workable, and sustainable relationships with the various stakeholders interested in our clients' work. The use of the model has resulted in local, regional, and even national recognition for our clients' public engagement.

We invite you to contact us personally when we can be of assistance.

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Preface

The public has so little trust in the media, government, and big corporations that it is just a guess on any given day which group is least trusted. No wonder there is an avalanche of Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) issues when the prevailing winds within the management of many organizations still blow in the direction of Decide, Announce, and Defend (DAD) instead of Inform, Educate, Engage, and Collaborate (IEEC).

Building trust and handling tough conversations by informing, engaging, and educating our neighbors about cleaning up environmental legacy issues is not easy, and it never will be. It is an arduous and challenging path that requires commitment, resources, and patience, yet following this path can and does keep many organizations out of the court of law. A bonus of this approach can be winning in the court of public opinion. We know that is true because we have witnessed it time and again.

Equally challenging is getting the management and executives of organizations to commit to following strategic, consistent, and resilient public engagement and communications processes to achieve collaborative, informed consent, a vital and integral part of any successful project, in our opinion.

More than four decades ago, we started developing the CIC process within a federal agency, not by design, but rather by a commitment to get outraged public members to sit down and talk with the very people creating the outrage.

Through trial and error and our colleagues' mentoring, training, and coaching, we developed and refined the collaborative informed consent model to assist our clients and meet their challenges.

We thank pioneers Hans and Anna Marie Bleiker at the [Institute of Participatory Management](#) and Planning and Jim Creighton, the founding president of the [International Association of Public Participation](#), who inspired and mentored us all these years.

The model is ever-evolving and improving, as any dynamic communications and engagement model should be. CIC has been successfully used on numerous public engagement projects, including various environmental remediation situations within Lockheed Martin and T.R.C., Bechtel, and Martin Marietta. Other successful implementations of CIC include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Energy, and at Land Between The Lakes and the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

A client list is available at www.ldarrylarmstrong.com

The CIC process results in meaningful, productive, and workable relationships between the project manager and their team and notable stakeholders and their affiliated organizations.

Our clients who have collaborated with us all these years have demonstrated the truth of the Ben Franklin adage. Franklin said, **Tell me, and I forget; teach me, and I may remember; involve me, and I learn.**

And of critical importance, our clients got their work done on time stayed out of the court of law while building trust and respect in the communities in which they work.

There is a lack of trust!

- **Trust Is Collapsing in America - When truth itself feels uncertain, how can a democracy be sustained? - The Atlantic January 2018**
- **As trust in news media dips to new lows, St. Louis journalists work to gain ground with audiences - St. Louis Public Radio, January 2018**
- **Americans Don't Trust Their Institutions Anymore - Five-Thirty-Eight.com November 2016**

Today's sad fact is that the public doesn't trust the government, corporations, or media much anymore. Surveys on this subject vary only by who or what institution is currently at the top of the list on any given day. As communicators and public engagement specialists, we must accept this perception because it is a reality in the public's minds. We must learn how to mitigate the perception through our communications and relationship-building processes. Stakeholder distrust emphasizes the importance and the necessity of using a collaborative, informed consent communication and engagement process.

For the remainder of the e-Book, we will refer to the acronym CIC for brevity.

Hans and Anna Marie Bleiker of the [Institute of Participatory Management and Planning](#) pioneered the concept of informed consent in community participation.

They define it as a situation where project management recognizes that informing and educating interested stakeholders about a project or problem, and managing stakeholder expectations while informing stakeholders of the benefit of doing the work, accrues to everyone's advantage.

If you are not familiar with Bleiker's historical work and envision a career where you will likely work with the public, we encourage you to consider taking one of their workshops.

Also, if you would like to have training in the CIC model or need a consultation, please go to our website www.ldarrylarmstrong.com for resources, webinars, podcasts, and videos, or call us.

What makes collaborative informed consent different than informed consent?

- **Embedding the communicator with the project team from the outset is essential**

The Collaborative Informed Consent (CIC) model carries the Bleiker's process several steps further, embedding the communicator and practitioner of public engagement and the CIC process into the project team from day one.

The model positions the communicator/public engagement specialist as a team participant at the project's planning table at the outset of the work. They will stay at this table until the project's completion.

By doing this, they come to understand the technical aspects of the project. As a critical team member, the communicator will see possible problems, issues, and concerns from an entirely different perspective than project managers and other team members.

When the communicator engages from the very outset, a sustainable venue for consultation and advisement on the communications and public engagement process is provided step-by-step throughout the project planning and development.

Such proactive counsel aims to prevent conflict from developing, enhance community engagement productively, and get the project work done while helping maintain the project schedule.

How did Collaborative Informed Consent come to be?

- **To build trust and integrity in your organization for public engagement, we must integrate the collaborative informed consent process into our daily thought processes and use it consistently.** --- [L. Darryl Armstrong](#) Ph.D. speaking at the National Association of Environmental Professionals Conference

The CIC refined and expanded informed consent model originates in the 1970s at the Land Between the Lakes National Demonstration and Recreation Area in Kentucky and Tennessee.

L. Darryl Armstrong, Ph.D., the Director of Information at LBL, piloted a communications and public engagement model that stressed collaboration with internal and external audiences in the decision-consideration process before decisions were made that impacted critical stakeholders.

As issue after issue arose about the controversial project and how it was managed, and public and media outrage began to build, Dr. Armstrong arranged meetings between his management and activists at neutral locations using process-trained facilitators.

The goal was to start talking **with not at each other in advance of controversy**. More importantly, the strategy was to inform and educate stakeholders and get their questions, issues, and concerns on the table for open and transparent discussion before lines were drawn and sides were taken.

When such a strategy is employed, the facilitator collaborates with the project manager from the outset of their project to understand all the work's possible political, social, economic, sociological, and psychological aspects.



- **Listen carefully, and please heed this advice. The communicator/project outreach specialist must be at the table from the beginning.**

The CIC model demands open and transparent communications between all parties internally and externally throughout the process. And, there must be a willingness of the project manager and their team to be committed to its planning, deployment, use, and evaluation from start to finish.

Why use this communications and engagement model?

- Tell me, and I forget; teach me, and I may remember; involve me, and I learn. – Benjamin Franklin

You are familiar with a groundwater model if you work in the remediation or environmental field. As communicators and facilitators, we believe it is equally essential to follow a model, a systematic process to inform and educate before engaging and attempting to collaborate with your targeted audiences. To be specific, you must have a rapport with the person before asking them out.

There are specific reasons we use this model:

First, the managers' communications and **relationship building** is enhanced by understanding how to use a strategic communications planning process.

Second, remediation projects are successful when **key stakeholders understand the problems and proposed solutions** and have their input considered, questions answered, and issues addressed openly and transparently from the project's outset instead of any attempts “to fly under the radar.”

Third, a critical communication goal for any project is to **build functional working and sustainable relationships** in our communities and with our regulators. These relationships become the foundation for stakeholders' trust in us. The CIC model provides the venue to accomplish this.

Finally, **open and transparent communications** with all stakeholders demonstrate the integrity of the process from the outset.

Our stakeholders vary from community to community. They include our regulators, neighbors to the site, and the surrounding local community. They include the locally elected officials, local, regional, and possibly even the national media, special interest groups, and others who have a **stake** – or interest – in whatever we are doing.

One person can and often has made the difference of communicating and engaging successfully versus creating public outrage!

- We should never forget the advice of Dr. Margaret Meade, the notable sociologist/anthropologist who said, Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever does.

Because just one person with drive and commitment can change history and thwart any project; the number of stakeholders is irrelevant; they may be as few as a couple of people or hundreds.

Should you doubt that one person can make a difference, we recommend reading the book [A Civil Action](#) or Google [Love Canal](#).

You will find one determined person at each of these sites who made a significant difference in public opinion and perception and, ultimately, the outcome.

The proposed work, whatever it may be, stakeholders believe it impacts them, their families, or their community. Therefore, they have a stake” in what takes place, and they want their voices heard.

Critical to the success of the CIC process is identifying in advance through extensive research as many potential stakeholders and issues as possible.

Therefore, we must be prepared to work with them and their various personality styles throughout the project's life.

Research early and often. Research is an iterative process throughout the journey!

- **Our first task when deploying the model is to research the community thoroughly.**

We must determine as best we can their past or current concerns and issues, the local politics, and any previous stakeholder interest or outrage they may have had about anything in the community.

Second, we must determine our potential stakeholders and their known interests. To accomplish this requires time and patience. It will also require visits to the community to get a lay of the land and insight from local officials and others.

We develop a behavioral, demographic, and issues profile from this research and then analyze it to determine applicability to our proposed work.

When we take the time to gather as much information and intelligence as possible about a community and then thoughtfully analyze it, we can discover things that will keep us out of trouble.

For example, we could have found that an activist group in Florida had thwarted a charitable organization's project in their neighborhood, the first in the charity's history in the United States.



- In Burlington, Massachusetts, we will recognize that there is a high probability that concerned citizens near the site of the highly controversial *A Civil Action* might use the state's Public Involvement Plan statute to alert us of their interest and intent to be involved.



- At Jackson Drop Forge, Michigan, we can determine that a neighbor's property line is adjacent to the worksite. She wants to be informed and engaged in the remediation solutions personally and will keep an eye on all the work when it gets underway.



- **In Middle River, Maryland, we learn that a former employee wants to be well informed and engaged to share his personal knowledge about the site and better understand the remediation alternatives. The former employee became instrumental in helping us engage the impacted local community and its civic leadership in a successful CIC process.**

Although we may not discover all potentially interested stakeholders and issues, this research provides a foundation for launching our work.

This research will help us develop the strategic communications planning, execution, and implementation criteria.

We will conduct ongoing evaluation and measurements using specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) goals for our evaluation process.

We should note that we will discover other stakeholders throughout the project through our ongoing inquiries.

At each step of the process, we will ask ourselves who else needs to know? And, who else wants to know about our proposed work?

Following the principles of the model, the team will lean forward and reach out and determine the people we need to establish and develop ongoing, respectful, and communicative relationships with, such as immediate (fence-line) neighbors and local elected officials. We may discern that some of these stakeholders will not want to wait to be informed about a project in a required public meeting.



- Furthermore, many of these people may not feel comfortable attending such a meeting and wish instead to be engaged early and personally to express their issues and concerns in a useful, productive, and yes, cooperative and perhaps even a collaborative process.

Agreeing to engage stakeholders right from the get-go of the project helps the project manager better understand the stakeholders' attitudes, concerns, and local issues; surfacing them at a time when handling them can be most productive.

When this style of communication outreach is carried on regularly throughout the life of a project, the manager can build beneficial, sustainable, and productive relationships, manage stakeholder expectations, and solve issues before they become intractable problems.

As one professional engagement practitioner once remarked, it is far better to start developing relationships in advance than to have to do so after the *kaka hits the fan blades*.

“Let’s talk in the middle of the room.”

- From the Nature Conservancy in Montana, Brian Martin characterized the role and value of collaborative, informed consent when he said: The benefit of working together far outweighs the benefit of fighting. You can yell at each other from the corners of the room, or you can talk in the middle. And we’re trying to talk in the middle.

Realistically, we should acknowledge that we all have had situations, such as Mr. Martin's, where we retreated to the corners of the room and *talked at* one another *instead of with* one another around the table.



(Redacted for client confidentiality.)

- At several sites, commitment to the CIC model has shown that a crisis can be averted and public outrage mitigated and even extinguished. Also, dedication to the CIC process builds and maintains respect for our clients within communities.

When appropriately used, consistently, and with integrity, the CIC process reflects an organization’s brand and reputation favorably in the court of public opinion. It often keeps the organization out of the court of law.

Public outrage is never comfortable.

- **Why did we have to hear about this on T.V. first? – Citizen at EPA Atlanta Public Meeting on Air Quality**

If you're relatively new to working within communities, or even if you're an old hand, you may not yet have experienced any absolute public outrage or even general interest in a project. However, when communication is not adequately planned and executed before putting boots on the ground, you may end up in highly emotional public meetings.

Some of your colleagues have been involved in such situations. They will tell you it's not a pleasant experience to be called out, shouted down, and personally attacked in a public venue.

Public contentiousness is especially real when the attendees are outraged at a meeting because they have not understood the complete story about your project or even the situation and problems that led to it.

Perhaps, they had heard rumors resulting from incomplete information or, even worse, read about the problem in the local newspaper, heard about it from a young T.V. reporter, or caught it while surfing the Internet before you told them yourself.

You can only achieve Collaborative Informed Consent one step at a time.

- **You achieve Collaborative Informed Consent just like you would climb Mount Everest, one step at a time! Remember, though this is a journey, not a marathon race to the finish.**

Managers who have had success with the CIC process recognize that the process is an integrated step-by-step function when correctly and consistently implemented.

The process engages critical stakeholders early and continuously to inform, educate, involve, and engage those most interested.

To begin, we must establish rapport and start building a functional relationship with each interested stakeholder.

Second, the problems the project addresses are defined precisely so the stakeholders can appreciate and understand the issues.

Then, stakeholders must understand the consequences of not solving the problems.

Next, the objectives of the work and how management proposes to solve the problem are then communicated clearly from the outset of the actual engagement. At the same time, input is sought and genuinely appreciated and, when practical and possible, integrated into the solutions.

At each step along the way, the manager agrees to follow through, and follow-up on concerns the stakeholders have shared.

There is a commitment to answer their questions and promptly bring their interests to higher management. The project manager fulfills these agreed-upon responsibilities no matter how seemingly inconsequential they may be.

Finally, and perhaps the most critical step, is the final one: communicating in a timely fashion back to the stakeholders and their community about how and why decisions came to be after thoughtfully and deliberately considering their input.

And mark this down and recall it when you report back that some of the input can't be successfully integrated, the public may not agree, but they will respect you for acknowledging and explaining the decision.

Always ask yourself who is impacted or possibly interested – in other words, who have a stake?

- **The first critical task in the CIC model/process is to conduct extensive research. We must determine who might be interested and why.**

Stakeholders are those people who are impacted or potentially affected by your project. Or people who are interested in what's going on for their reasons.

Rule one is that stakeholders must be informed and educated as early as possible. You can't over-communicate with these folks.

The last thing we need is for a critical stakeholder to read or hear about the work in the media before they learn about it from you.

The second step is to prepare our communications so that an 80-year old grandmother with an 8th-grade education could understand the problem and why it needs to be solved.

Over the years, we have found this a challenging problem because technical people often assume that nontechnical stakeholders do not have the educational wherewithal to digest data. That assumption is wrong.

Your communications people will, at all times, explain the what, who, when, where, why, and how of the project.

They will do so that those hearing the explanations can leave the meeting feeling they have the best possible understanding.

Who else needs to know?

- **Who else wants to know?**
- **Frequently be asking yourself and your team, Who else needs to know?**

Suppose people are likely to be interested in your project and hear about it first in the media or from a less-than-fully-informed activist group or inexperienced reporter. In that case, they will automatically ask, Why am I the last to know?

Interested stakeholders want to know what's going on here and will always ask why am I being excluded? It may not be a logical reaction; however, human nature being what it is, it is a predictable behavioral reaction.

Past behavior predicts future behavior.

- **The earlier you inform and educate your stakeholders, the better you cannot over-communicate!**



For example, community leaders who have thwarted a shelter home in their community will be outraged to be the last to know there is a contaminated groundwater plume underneath their homes. (Wouldn't anybody?)

Failing to take the time to discover and explore possible issues and past behaviors of stakeholders within a community leads to stakeholder cynicism and skepticism of you and the organization, outrage or harmful activism, and media scrutiny. Outrage and project disruption intensifies when the stakeholders are not brought into the communications and engagement from the outset.

Once you engage stakeholders to inform and educate them to have conversations and seek input and feedback, you must continue to do so in good faith to extend the process's trust, integrity, and credibility.

The conventional DAD approach will invariably lead to NIMBY and public outrage.

- **For too many years, organizations and managers in government and corporations approached projects as if they were the only experts.**

They thought they knew best how to solve a problem and did not want or need public involvement. Many “managers” saw public input and participation as off-putting and unnecessary.

Public participation professionals correctly label this as the paternal, or DAD, approach. I'll decide what's best; I'll announce it, and then I'll defend it.

The way many organizations informed people was to hold a traditional public meeting led by an untrained facilitator or a technical person and pray from the outset that no one would attend.

However, if people did attend, they were often presented with a technical presentation more suitable for a professional conference. Comments and sometimes questions were taken (and sometimes not even answered), and the public never had any idea what happened to their input.

Sadly, many governmental and corporate public meetings as described are still commonplace, and this approach leads to the community NIMBY response – Not in my backyard!

NIMBY is the predictable stakeholder behavioral response when using the DAD approach and often leads to public outrage, negative media coverage, and strong stakeholder resentment.

The CIC model is resilient and adaptable.

- The model never considers using the DAD approach. If that is your style, this information is not for you.

Sometimes, you can use CIC to successfully reset projects that started out using decide, announce, and defend. It is better not to reset; it is better to start out using CIC.

Collaborative Informed Consent starts with an internal and eventually an external consultative process. The communicator consults with the manager's team to discover possible stakeholders one person, one issue, and one step at a time.

In the consultative phase, we often talk one-on-one with individual stakeholders. In the next step, the participatory stage, we expand the audience to small groups of stakeholders interested in the project and discovered through the first step.

Taking the information from these sessions, the communicator will do extensive research to understand further the stakeholder's past behaviors and their community's concerns as well as the social, economic, political, and environmental issues, the known activist groups, and individual fence-line neighbor concerns.

CIC is as much a mindset as it is a process!



- **Establishing the mindset and demonstrating the commitment to CIC behaviorally, we can begin to cooperate, which will lead to collaboration.**

Using the Internet, site visits, and interviews with former employees and personal contacts with key stakeholders in the community, the communicator will outline a community behavioral profile, which tells the project manager what to expect.

At the outset, we are seeking cooperation from the key stakeholders. Using this information, the communicator and the project manager then consult with some of the identified key stakeholders. This consultation helps to understand better who, what, when, where, and how to communicate and engage with others in the community. Who knows more about the community than these stakeholders? Asking them to share this information honors them, and they are often not just thankful but surprised you took the time to ask.

Through this consultation at the very outset, we are setting a stage, thereby **creating the mindset**, if you will, first of cooperation that leads ultimately to collaboration with some key interested and influential parties.

Through **the behavior** of the manager and communicator, we demonstrate behaviorally to our stakeholders our intent to plan the communications and interactions in consultation with them. In other words, they will help us build the communications and public engagement process that will be most effective in communicating to those most interested in the project within their community.

We will discover from this interaction what venues of delivery, tactics, and strategies might work best in their community.



- For example, at Scully in New York, we talked around the kitchen table. However, at Middle River, Maryland, we used newsletters, briefings with civic association leaders, a series of working group meetings, and hands-on engagement with the community in such projects as Bein' Green, a local cleanup day.

And in Great Neck, New York, regular briefings to local elected officials and sharing information on the website appear to be working.

The typical stakeholder behavioral response to our asking them for advice and counsel on how best to communicate with them has been an appreciation and increased their willingness to consult and engage with us over time. When stakeholders are sincerely asked for their assistance, they will provide it.

The communicator as a project team member.

- **You might think that we are ready to go to a public meeting after this work. However, you would be wrong!**



- **Before proceeding to the next phase of the CIC model, as communicators, we will sit with you and your team and understand the environmental and technical problems at your site and the possible solutions from your perspective. Remember we said at the outset that the model seeks to build internal and external collaboration?**

We will challenge you with tough questions that we believe the community will ask and want answers before talking to them about your project. We will posit issues and worse-case scenarios you may never have considered and help you plan how to address them.

Based on what we have learned, we will only discuss your next steps and prepare you and the team for the group participation stage, including public informational meetings, more formal meetings, open houses, or community coffees.

Collaboration internally is also critical to our success.

- The ability and venue to consult and regularly advise the manager and their team are why it is essential for the communicator to have an ongoing seat at the project planning table from the outset.



- The more the communicator understands your project builds relationships and rapport with the project team and with you as a manager, the more effective they can be in helping you work with your stakeholders.

The communicator will work with you to develop presentations that explain the data and the problems and the proposed solutions in nontechnical language using examples, metaphors, anecdotes, photographs, and illustrations that are easily understandable to the targeted audiences.

We will rehearse tough questions, prepare you for interviews, and work with you and your team members, so you are confident standing in front of any size audience and presenting as comfortably and relaxed as possible.

Finally, we will also prepare a series of worst-case community scenarios and possible crises and how we might best respond.

We will help you lose the acronyms of your natural tech-speak and help put your presentation and messages in plain English so that the identified critical stakeholders can understand and appreciate it.

We will work with you on how best to establish rapport with these stakeholders, execute a presentation with a positive and informative tone, and enhance the delivery of your messages by choosing the appropriate language.

Finally, we will help you become more mindful of your nonverbals and how to use them to build rapport so that your audience can identify with you as a person, not just a corporate project manager. Once completed, we are ready to move into the group participation and involvement processes.

Why do we have a public meeting?

- **Let's ask ourselves: Why do we hold 'public' meetings? Most of us answer because we are required by regulation to do so.**

Well, yes, maybe we are required. However, a public meeting under regulation intends to give information to the public and get the stakeholders' input, correct?

In many cases, the traditional public meetings of the past simply established a forum for speakers to deliver boring technical presentations that often led to public scrutiny, if not outrage, critical media attention, or sometimes general apathy, depending on the subject matter.

It also often provided a forum for stakeholders to vent their outrage.

Too often, the outcome of the public not attending a public meeting comes back to haunt the project. How many times have we heard, Whew, nobody showed up! Guess we flew under the radar.

If regulations require a public meeting, then let's make such meetings of value to everyone.

Perhaps, we could even have a public informational session designed to inform and educate in a relaxed one-to-one atmosphere before the formal regulatorily required meeting.

Why CIC informational sessions work – language choice.

- How we use and choose to use our language in our presentations, invitations, and responses is critical to success.



- Under the CIC model, we don't do traditional public meetings with talking tech-heads, nor do we provide a stage for outrage.

Instead, we hold facilitated informational sessions, briefings, updates, workshops, community coffees, availabilities, or open houses that are directly focused on informing and educating the attendees about your project. We even provide time to have one-on-one conversations.

These sessions are specifically designed to engage attendees conversationally while informing and educating them about our work. They also provide facilitated question and answer sessions and listening opportunities to get meaningful and productive feedback.

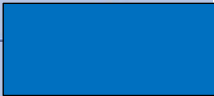
The CIC model sets the tone and establishes protocols at the outset of any meeting. That tone is always one of welcoming our guests, actively listening to them, and then engaging in respectful conversation.

That is why it is critically important that we follow specific language protocols when distributing notifications and advertisements and conducting CIC meetings.

After all, think about the differences between attending an informational session or an open house or a community coffee instead of a public meeting.

Therefore, even the traditional regulatorily-required public meetings that our clients' conduct receive complimentary remarks from regulators and attendees because the facilitated model is structured to help all parties succeed.

One of the model tenets is that the choice and use of language make a difference in how our stakeholders perceive us and understand our information.




**You are personally invited to a
Public Informational Meeting on the
Operating Unit -2 (Offsite)
Remedial Investigation (RI) of the
Former Unisys Site. ...**

Where: Great Neck South High School Auditorium, 341 Lakeville Road

When: Thursday, January 25, 2001

6 – 7:15 p.m. ~ Poster Availability Session
7:30 – 9 p.m. ~ Power Point Remedial Investigation Presentation

Representatives from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York State Department of Health and Locke Corporation will be on hand to answer your questions one-on-one. Light refreshments will be served.



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(Information redacted for client confidentiality.)

The CIC model doesn't subscribe to asking people to attend public meetings. Instead, we invite our neighbors and interested stakeholders as guests to visit with us at an informational session where they talk one-to-one with project personnel.

At such engagements, they can view posters, review technical data with project members who can interpret it in understandable language, and get their questions personally answered.

Attendees can provide informal feedback, make comments, and raise issues in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

Notice that the simple change of the language from a public meeting to an informational session **changes the tone** of the invitation and the subsequent interaction.

CIC meetings are **facilitated** by someone other than a project manager. Typically, a trained neutral communicator and facilitator who has no horse in the race runs the meeting.

The facilitator **sets the tone** of the meeting and maintains it throughout, regardless of the evolving environment. These meetings seek participation and engagement by providing an informative, non-threatening, nonstressful, and comfortable environment for public members who choose to attend.

Even those used to meet regulatory mandates, these structured informal meetings don't require attendees to come forward to a podium and microphone; most often, the facilitator will bring the microphone to them if needed.

A refreshment table is provided before and after the meeting and allows a place for one-to-one interactions with the project team.

Carefully chosen for their interpersonal skills and ability to personally engage and, if needed, de-escalate tension or stress, project team attendees and speakers are trained in presentation delivery and rehearsed before they attend.

We encourage the team members to engage the guests (not talk amongst themselves), listen carefully to discern community concerns and issues, and always thank anyone who has attended personally.

The key to success is establishing and sustaining rapport.

- **Never rushing attendees through their interactions, the project team members understand they are expected to interact with the attendees (not one another) from the moment the guest arrives, with the intent to establish and build sustainable rapport.**

Achieving rapport comes from the ability of a person to gain a good understanding of someone and then have the ability to communicate well with them. Moreover, we always express genuinely our appreciation for our guests who attended and engaged with us.

During the group meetings, the facilitator often repeats the questions asked by an attendee as a courtesy to the other attendees and the speakers. They will always thank the commenting attendee. These meetings feel relaxed, comfortable, and informal while showing high levels of respect and providing informative and educational material.

We also always ask attendees, How can we do better in our outreach process? What do you recommend we do differently? What did you like, and what would you change?

Why do we use operating principles, not ground rules?

- The facilitator establishes the meetings' parameters and protocols using proposed operating principles so that the attendees can help define the principles instead of using traditional ground rules, as many governmental organizations prefer.

The facilitator conducts the meeting showing respect to all the parties engaged and shows no favoritism to one party or another. The calming and inclusive behavior of the facilitator is observable throughout the meeting by the attendees.

A facilitator asks for clarifications and seeks further insights on issues. The facilitator reads their audience and follows up on questions or concerns identified. If inquiries need research, the facilitator ensures responses are provided at the next meeting or are handled personally by the manager.

Facilitators are responsible for bringing a sense of calm, authority, respect, and courtesy into every meeting. They recognize that any barbs, unkind or insensitive remarks made by attendees, should there be any, are not to be taken personally. Facilitators must be the quintessential diplomat and conduct the meeting with a servant's heart.



- The public can quickly tell if you are genuinely interested in what they have to say or not.

Surveys and focus groups conducted in the 1990s by Armstrong and Associates after traditional public meetings revealed that 70% of attendees, the sample was 100 people, found that respondents said presenters were arrogant, self-centered, too technical, cold and stiff, and appeared uncomfortable.

Asking attendees what the presenter's intent was, their responses were they (the speakers) just wanted to get it over with, checking it off the list of things to do, or getting out of the situation as quickly as possible. Have we not all seen, or at least deduced, such behavior at public meetings?

Moreover, that is why being trained in using the CIC model, interpersonal skill development, and the execution of lay-friendly presentations is critical for managers and their teams to succeed.

The more comfortable the presenter is in making the presentation understandable through telling stories and using examples, the more readily they can develop a rapport.

We are always seeking conversation, not confrontation.

- **The CIC model emphasizes that the intent of all presenters at any meeting is to engage, inform and educate, solicit feedback, clarify issues, answer questions, and help attendees understand the project through a comfortable, respectful, and appreciative conversational approach.**

The behavior of the manager and his team demonstrates they want to be there and shows they want to engage in conversation, not confrontation with the attendees. Presenters must understand that meeting attendees read the manager and their team's and the facilitator's nonverbal behaviors intuitively and quickly.

Skilled and trained presenters and facilitators understand that people **feel** just as much, if not more, than they **think** their way through things. When presenters intend to listen actively and engage in dialogue/conversation, they demonstrate it through open and transparent verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

When attendees witness inclusive behavior consistently, trust and credibility with the attendees begin to develop. Presenters further enhance the integrity of the communications process when behaviorally they walk their talk and use appropriate nonverbals.

In the 1970s, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis summed up in a legal opinion what many stakeholders think and feel about public meetings held by government and corporate officials.

He admonished the government for their attitude that the public and their opinions be damned.

He referred to a project proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers where the Corps had not done an outstanding job of getting public feedback and input. Too many stakeholders still believe this is the attitude of presenters at formal public meetings.

The CIC model minimizes this skeptical and cynical attitude proactively through proper planning and execution of the model to fulfill Judge Brandeis's belief that **Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants. When you are consistently open and transparent, you will build trust, respect, and likeability with the stakeholders.**

The CIC model exists on the foundational principle that our clients will always be open and transparent about their work and communications with a community. The model stresses the need to be available to the community and invites stakeholders to contact the manager and communicator with any issues or questions.

Openness and transparency in our communications build trust, and our consistent behavioral responses to the stakeholders demonstrate our trustworthiness.

However, the manager must be committed to using the model consistently from start to finish!



- **The manager is committed to consistently using the model to prevent a communications crisis effectively. The manager and the communicator will collaborate to design strategies and tactics to move the communications path through the consultative and participatory stages leading to collaboration.**

You will recall these two stages are where individual and group engagement occurs. Only after completing these two stages can we introduce the critical phase – that of collaboration – and when we do, we can achieve a far more productive and engaging path because we can work with the public more actively in the process.

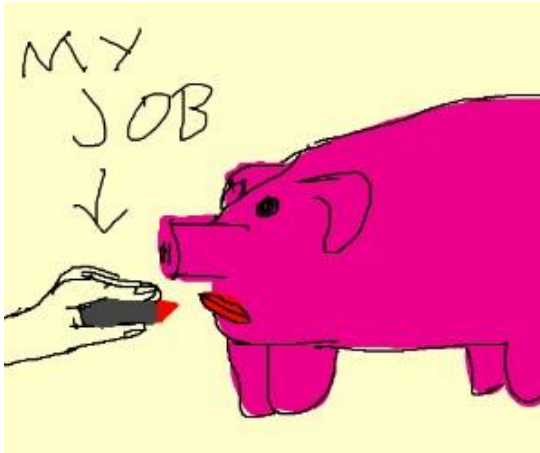
After skillful execution of the first two stages, we can proceed into phase three – **The Collaborative Stage.**

The model's philosophy reassures people impacted by your project that they will **come to know you as a person they can work with, depend on, and trust.** Working with your communicator, you will learn how best to design and present your messages and show your stakeholders various aspects of your work in ways you may not have considered.

You will come to understand why it is critical to engage with your stakeholders in venues other than facilitated meetings. You will come to appreciate why engagements such as community cleanup days, environmental fairs, and STEAM events open doors to developing meaningful relationships with your stakeholders that otherwise are closed.

As the stakeholders become comfortable with you as a person who is genuinely interested in them and their perspectives, the process allows you and the team to offer them the experience of collaboration, leading to a better understanding of their needs, expectations, concerns, issues, and fears.

The importance of building trust, integrity, and credibility.



- Throughout the process, there are no hidden agendas, no P.R. spins or trying to put lipstick on the proverbial pig, or reverting to the unacceptable decide- announce- defend, DAD approach.

However, once stakeholders develop trust with you, you can introduce the concept of **co-laboring** and begin to resolve your/their issues and concerns as they emerge.

Once stakeholders trust you, they will bring problems forward voluntarily and promptly. A commitment to the collaborative model can help the organization rate high in the public's opinion by building your **organizational** trust, integrity, and credibility.

Moreover, and significantly, typically using the collaborative process from day one will help keep your project out of litigation while reducing the possibility of negative media coverage.

In time, your project can be seen favorably in the court of public opinion because **your behavior demonstrates a commitment** to open, transparent, and proactive communications.

Stakeholders can and often do take “ownership.”

- Stakeholders who are consistently engaged in your process typically take ownership of your project’s success. In that spirit, they help identify emerging local issues, some of which you may never have even considered, that could impact your success.



- For example, in Middle River, one of the civic leaders told us that a new couple from California had moved into the neighborhood and were voicing their disgruntlement with big corporations. The civic leader made an appointment and sat down to explain what all the company had done to keep the community informed about the cleanup work and the next steps in the process.

These are the type of stakeholders (who also can become third-party endorsers of your work) who will **share their personal and community values** with you, all of which you must understand for your project to succeed.

Measurable engagement improves trust and credibility between all parties and helps create mutual ownership and support for the work. Of course, the collaborative process also helps satisfy the requirement for public meetings.

However, this process further informs and educates stakeholders even more than many regulators require. **Federal and state regulators have commented on its demonstrated value more than once.** They have come to understand why the process works and that it makes them look good in the court of public opinion and appreciate why you use the method to go above and beyond to develop relationships.

Proclaimed by some state and federal regulators as a model approach, Maryland regulators have said they wish other responsible parties used the same model.

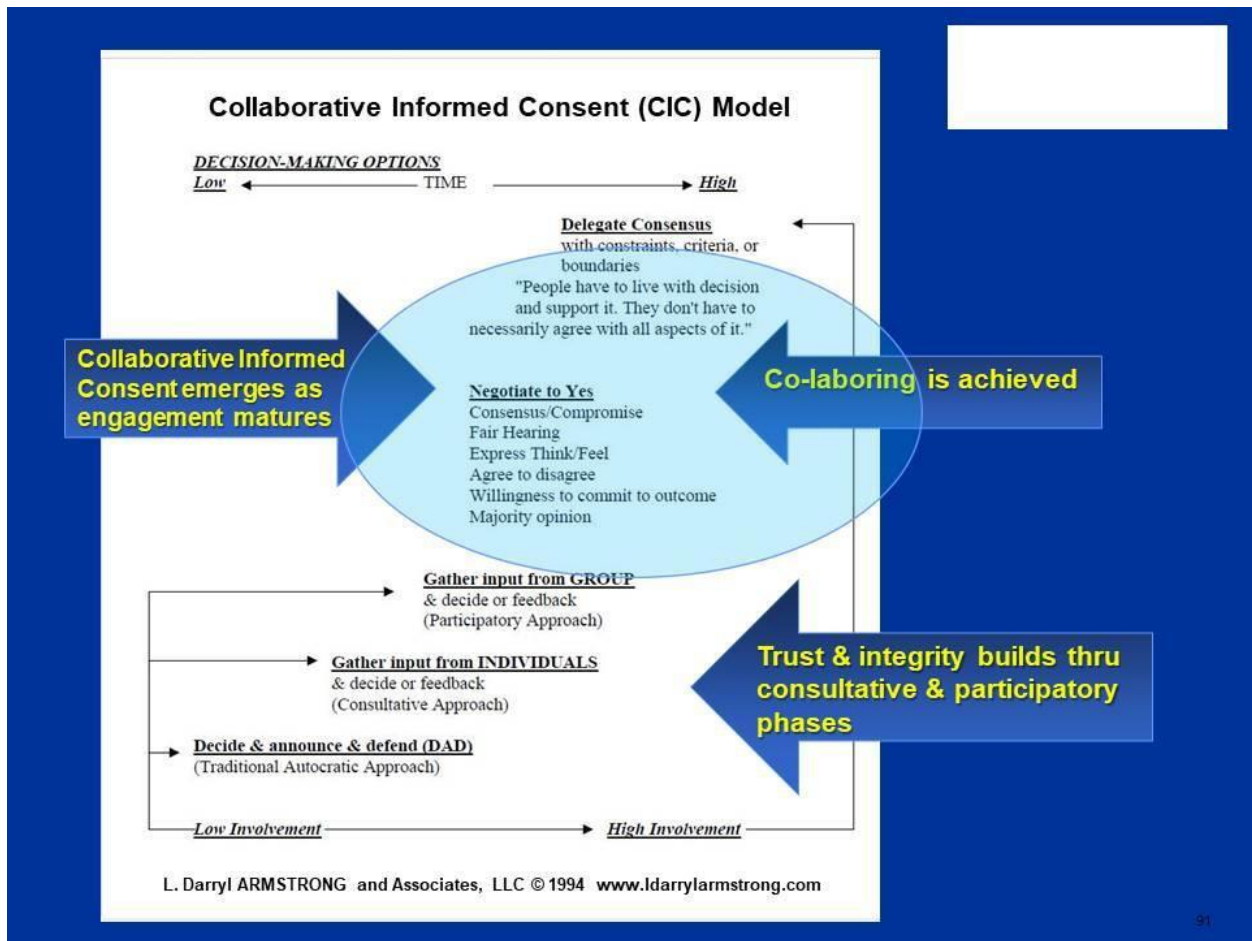
- **Not surprisingly, the collaborative process helps anticipate, predict, and prevent communications crises. Therefore, it can even help reduce overall project costs.**

We can all recall instances when community outrage has led to project schedule slippage, increased costs, expensive litigation, and negative media coverage.

The CIC model, when engaged properly, can ensure projects stay on focus. Managers can develop community acceptance and collaborative, informed consent and agreed-upon solutions more efficiently, as demonstrated at Middle River, Maryland; Burlington, Massachusetts; Akron, Ohio; Wells, Maine; and Great Neck, New York.

Permit processing can proceed with minimal and often no public comment. When stakeholders are well informed and educated and trust you because you have **walked your talk**, they may even wish to write letters asking for permits to be expedited as quickly as possible, as we have seen in Maryland!

The final successful stage of the process is when all parties, the project management and stakeholders are **co-laboring**. At this stage, we are mutually working together to birth the project. Think of this analogy, the baby is gestating, and it is time to arrive and begin the maturation process.



- In the final stage leading to collaboration, we all agree to identify and resolve emerging issues and address thorny questions as they arise. Everyone understands and agrees that there always will be a give and take.

Further, this means that the stakeholder's needs sometimes can't be met, and we can agree to disagree without repercussions. At all times, we will co-labor to reach an understanding while managing stakeholder expectations.

We don't just agree to cooperate and play nice-nice at this stage.

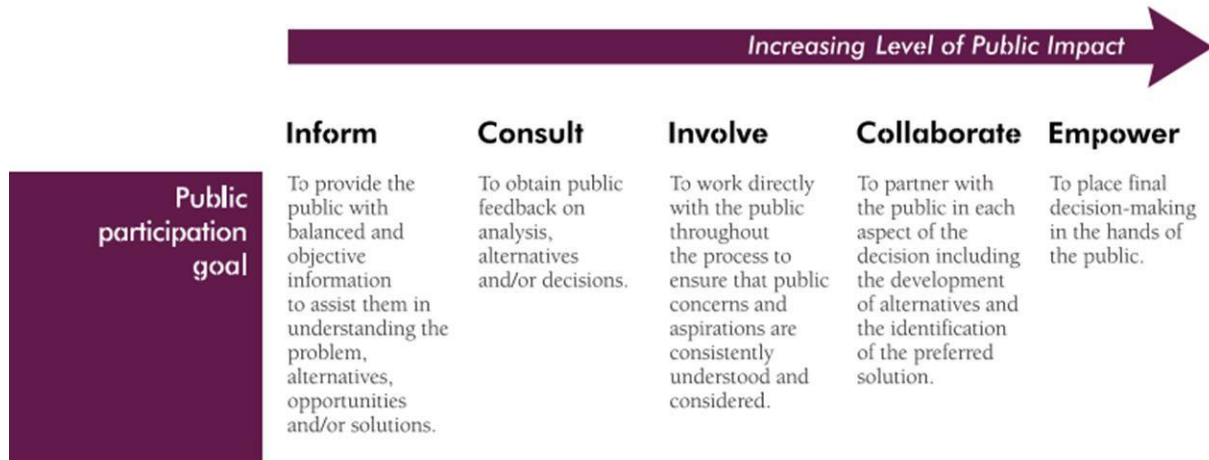
- **The informed, collaborative phase is where we introduce and use the concept to co-labor with each other even when the going gets tough.**

At this juncture, the project team and stakeholders sit down at the same table in working sessions, even when these meetings may be in a social environment such as a lunch or dinner, to discuss alternative solutions to project design and problems and issues that need resolution.

It is also the point where the resilient CIC communication process can be renovated, if necessary, to become more robust or more personal as needed.

One common misunderstanding is the unfounded belief that the CIC model is too complicated and involved to be used. The model is not merely a facilitated regulatory public meeting.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



- **The CIC model and its components exist on a spectrum. Each element focuses on specific, measurable goals to educate and inform those in the community interested in the project before involving them.**

The model **requires establishing a dialogue with active listening from the outset** between the team, the stakeholders, and, of course, the communicator.

The strategy helps establish front-end collegial working and sustainable relationships. The manager and communications team may decide whether several meetings are necessary before and after a public forum or not.

The level of use and deployment depends on the **level of interest and risk** associated with the project. The **higher the risk** of public or media outrage, litigation, or reputation damage, the **higher the need for more engagement**.

Remember, to achieve success with a community and your stakeholders; **you can never over-communicate** in the informational and educational phase.

Using the CIC model requires an investment of time and budget from the outset.

- Project managers should understand that the Collaborative model can reap significant rewards and mitigate risks for all parties when used consistently and appropriately.

The CIC model is **resilient and adaptable** to each situation, depending on the interests and concerns of the stakeholders.

Identifying these interests and concerns requires advanced **comprehensive community research**.

By understanding a community in all its socio-economic, activism, and political entanglements, the project manager and communications and engagement professionals, can develop a viable plan that responds to often predictable issues, reducing or mitigating **crises from developing**.

Examples where mission success was achieved.

- **To date, our clients have facilitated the Collaborative model successfully at such sites as Burlington, Massachusetts; Jackson Drop Forge, Michigan; Syracuse (Bloody Brook), New York; Great Neck on Long Island, New York; Martin State Airport and Middle River, Maryland; Akron, Ohio; Riverside, California; New Hartford, New York; and Wells, Maine.**

These are just a few examples. A selected client list is available at www.ldarrylarmstrong.com

- **Today at each of these sites, impacted fence-line neighbors and other interested stakeholders, as well as federal, state, and local governmental agencies and officials, are all satisfied, well-informed, engaged, and the site work is either underway or completed.**

Known in these communities as reliable and trustworthy corporate citizens, our clients maintain open and transparent communications with all stakeholders. The managers are known for walking their talk and doing the right thing because the community has consistently seen this behavior from them and their teams from day one of the project.

The stakeholders know the manager and their team personally and trust them. No litigation has occurred at any of these sites, and the media and stakeholders view the corporation and its brand favorably.

Communicators, project managers, and regulators abhor resets.

- **Great Neck, New York, Middle River, and Martin State Airport, Maryland, are examples of heavily invested versions of the Collaborative Informed Consent model.**

Not used initially, each of these sites required a community reset. While these resets were successful, they each needed extensive additional work to quickly identify stakeholders, their issues, their relationships with each other, and the local power structure. Stakeholders are now engaged and supportive, and work is progressing well.

However, please note as a manager that emotions in these reset situations can run high, and resetting the community participation model can sometimes be a risky and expensive task. A reset has no guarantee of success.

Hell hath no fury as a community ignored! Start out right and resets are unnecessary, but remember, Start out like you are willing to hold out!

The Collaborative Informed Consent plan doesn't need to be elaborate and often isn't!

- **Using the CIC model won't necessarily require an extensive number of meetings with stakeholders unless further engagement is deemed necessary based on thoughtful research or knowledge specific to the situation.**

There are situations where the involvement is merely the project manager, the communicator, and a stakeholder or two talking around a kitchen table, as was the case at the Scully project in New Hartford, New York.

Often, stakeholders who have been informed and stay informed over a period drift away, leaving just a small yet influential group of leaders to work with, as in Middle River, Martin State, and Great Neck.

At the beginning of a project, appropriate, well-planned stakeholder engagement typically lowers public demand for involvement at later project stages.

Always leave them feeling good.

- Finally, as project work is completed or significantly winds down, we must close out our relationship respectfully so that, if needed in the future, we can quickly re-engage, and the stakeholders will recall our relationship positively.



Holding a celebration such as we did in Scully, Wells, and Akron costs little in the scheme of things yet provides a way for our impacted to see the fruits of their labor and allows us to thank attendees personally.

Sending a personalized thank you letter or, even better, a handwritten note of appreciation keeps the good feeling of you in the stakeholder's mind. Then if you need to reopen or re-engage a year or two down the road, your last contact with them is remembered as positive.

It is true; **It is not what we say to our stakeholders; ultimately, it is how we make them feel and leave them feeling that makes the difference in our reputations.**

In conclusion

- Ironically, we would not ordinarily think of someone from China as being considered an outspoken advocate for public participation. However, consider Ma Jun (Mah Jween), the Director at one of China's most dynamic environmental Non-Governmental Organizations, the Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE).

He is bold, courageous, forthright, and a consistent campaigner for public involvement in environmental issues in his country and internationally. He is also an internationally recognized investigative journalist and one of the most highly-regarded proponents for public participation in Southeast Asia.

Jun has said, I firmly believe that environmental issues can't be addressed without extensive public participation, but people need to be informed before they can get involved.

We could not agree more.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Workshops, webinars, consultations, and resources.

Please visit our website and call us if we can be of assistance.

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Dr. L. Darryl Armstrong is the principal in L. Darryl ARMSTRONG and Associates Behavioral Public Relations LLC.

The 28-year old behavioral public relations firm coaches and counsels clients in strategically planning engagements to prevent, minimize, or resolve conflict using the Collaborative Informed Consent® (CIC) public engagement and communications model.

Developed by Dr. Armstrong in the 1970s at a Federal national recreation area in western Kentucky and Tennessee, the award-winning model stresses dialogue, interaction, and engagement in developing strategic, tactical, and operational plans using a team-based approach.

Armstrong earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism, Business, and Behavioral Psychology in three years at Murray State University (1971), aided by an ROTC scholarship and working as MSU's Assistant to the Director of Sports Information.

Before returning to Murray State University for a Masters and Specialist (30-hours above) degree (1974), he worked under contract for a Federal agency providing crisis and emergency operational and tactical planning. He also edited a weekly newspaper and managed a team of 12 employees.

Q security clearance. In 1973, he entered Federal service as the Deputy Director of Public Information (GS-09) at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Land Between The Lakes. Promoted to the Director's position (GS-11) in 1975, he began refining the CIC model. The model engaged critics and opponents of the federal project in ongoing communications and engagement.

In 1979, Armstrong moved to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as Chief of Public Affairs and Emergency Operations Planning for the Nashville District. At the time, he was one of the youngest GS-13 PAO managers in the Corps. During his tenure there under the District Commander's direction, he integrated the CIC planning approach on the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway projects. Top secret clearance status. Q security clearance.

Armstrong returned to TVA and served as Assistant General Manager (GS-15) for State Legislative Affairs (1981-1983); District

Administrator for the 45 county Kentucky-Tennessee Districts (1983-1988), and concurrently as Aide to Chairman of the TVA Board (1987-1989). During this TVA tenure, Armstrong completed requirements and training for the Senior Executive Service. Q security clearance.

In 1989, Armstrong earned his Ph.D. in clinical hypnotherapy, forensic hypnosis, and neuro-linguistics from the California - American Institute of Hypnotherapy (AIH).

He joined Oak Ridge National Laboratory as Director of Public Information (GS-15) and served from 1989-1993. During his tenure, his challenge was to build a team to bring national-international attention to the national laboratory projects collaborating with the U.S. Department of Energy. Dr. Armstrong's team received recognition for its efforts from DOE, ATSDR, USCOE, TVA, and EPA. Q security clearance.

Dr. Armstrong currently has no security clearances.

Dr. Armstrong established with his wife, Kay, ARMSTRONG, and Associates in 1993.

Their clients include non-profits, small businesses, Federal and State agencies, and local governments. The firm has received state and national awards for strategic, tactical, operational crisis and emergency communications planning, facilitation training, and public engagement in the communities where environmental remediation projects are underway.

He has presented at the U.S. Army War College and numerous professional societies. Dr. Armstrong has been an adjunct professor at Murray State and Western Kentucky universities, the Economic Development Institute, and was a workshop developer and trainer at the University of Kentucky and Tennessee.

They currently provide counsel and training via teleconferencing and video conferencing.

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