

How Do You Deal With Divisiveness, Opposition, and General Orneriness

As reported by many community leaders, the level of discord at community meetings across Arkansas has risen dramatically. Community leaders were expressing alarm and seemed desperate to find a way around or through the divisiveness in their community. I chose the Public Conversations Project (PCP) model because it appeared to be more responsive to a particular aspect of divisiveness in rural areas and small cities, i.e., the effect on relationships.

Big cities can easily absorb a few people in hot conflict with one another. Small populations can't. The PCP model was reconstituted from the work in the field of family therapy. It seeks to build understanding, respect and trust among differing parties by working in small groups of 5-7 people. They also have great success stories and endorsements. When a civil consensus is not possible because the two sides are too far apart (think, for example, of abortion/anti-abortion) PCP is a way to at least achieve civil disagreement so that neighbors on both sides of the issue can still worship together, work together, play together and volunteer together.

For more information about the model, go to www.publicconversations.org.

Jerry L. Smith, ASU Delta Center for Economic Development
jerry@astate.edu, 870.680.8273