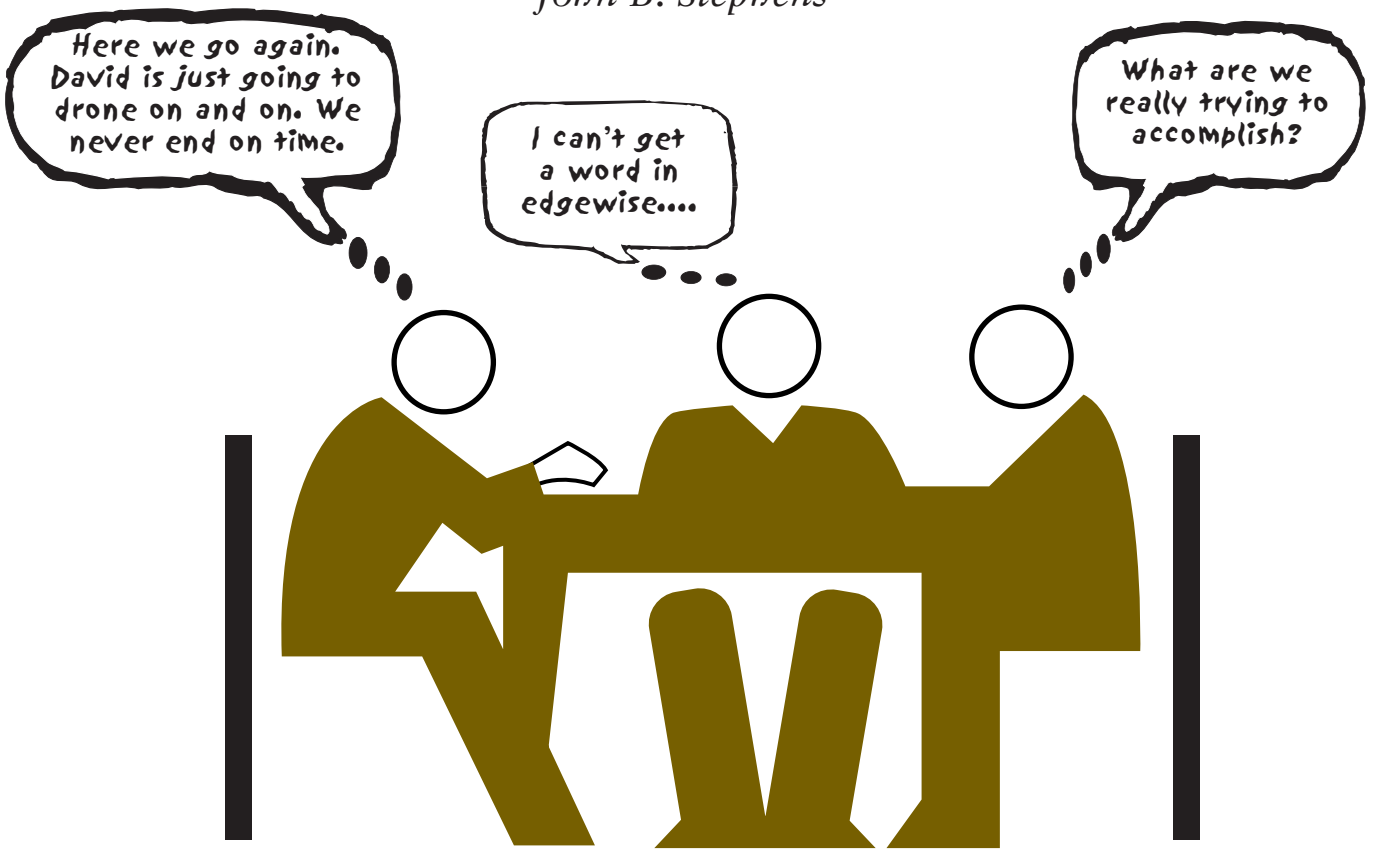
Achieving Better Group Performance

John B. Stephens



Public affairs activities are demanding more and more work in groups. Whether a group of business, nonprofit, and government representatives is collaborating on Smart Start or Work First, an elected local government board is deciding on services and taxes, or people simply need to get through meetings and accomplish their tasks, working effectively in groups is key.

When they are working in a group on a public matter, people often dread the time and the slow sense of progress. "Committees keep minutes and lose hours" is one fatalistic view of what happens when a task force, a committee, or another group must get something done.

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Many difficulties arise from insufficient attention to how a group approaches its work. A thoughtful approach to a group's process is important to its effectiveness. For example, if the duration of a group's work is medium- to long-term (from a few months to a year or more), specific attention to expectations of behavior is more likely to pay off than if the duration of the group's work is brief. Similarly, if the membership of a group is diverse—people from several government departments, representatives of different neighborhoods, or people of various ages and racial or ethnic heritages—greater attention than usual to how the work gets done can minimize misunderstanding and conflict. (For more factors that determine when there is a heightened need to develop shared expectations for a group, see Table 1, page 39.)

This article is intended for groups of *medium- or long-term duration* (three months or more) addressing *important public matters* (for example, development of policies affecting many people, or private-public efforts to monitor and deliver social services) on which *conflicting viewpoints* are likely. It draws on the themes of a recent book I coauthored with E. Franklin Dukes and Marina Piscolish, *Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities*.[1]

The article begins with a statement of the principles of an approach to group process that my book coauthors and I call "reaching for higher ground." It then describes at length how those principles were relevant in two recent state-level situations, one of which occurred in North Carolina. Finally, it summarizes several other government and community efforts that illustrate how ideas about reaching for higher ground are taking concrete shape.

The Need for More than Ground Rules

"Before this meeting begins, let's go over our ground rules." This phrase, in various forms, is becoming more and more common in North Carolina government circles. In 1990 the Institute of Government began offering a two-week course, Group Facilitation and Consultation. It has prepared dozens of state and local government employees to facilitate the work of their own agencies and to assist elected boards, top management teams, and government-citizen groups from other jurisdictions.

A central part of the facilitation model taught in the course is three general values and sixteen specific ground rules. Examples of the ground rules are "Test assumptions and inferences" and "Disagree openly with any member of the group." The rules are designed to support the values of gaining valid information, making free and informed choices, and committing oneself to group decisions.[2]

Since 1993 the Institute has offered a workshop entitled Working for Results as a Governing Board, which helps city councils and county commissions conduct their work productively. A key component of this workshop is to make explicit certain ground rules for people to follow.

Finally, several Institute publications have helped guide North Carolina government officials in working more efficiently and in using various tools for planning, meeting management, and organizational change.[3]

Ground rules for a group often are useful. However, my book coauthors and I have identified several weaknesses or outright failures in the common use of typical ground rules.[4] There are three categories of problems: how ground rules are introduced, how ground rules are used, and what ordinary ground rules don't do.

How ground rules are introduced often can weaken their effectiveness. They are usually offered in a directive manner. A list of rules is presented, typically by a group's chair or facilitator. He or she may ask, "Are these rules acceptable?" but the question is frequently taken as rhetorical. Further, once the meeting starts or the group meets a second or third time, there is little opportunity to illustrate or understand the rules.

Second, ground rules are introduced so that following them appears to be less valuable than "really doing the work." They are almost always cast as a preliminary part of what happens in a meeting or a work group, an element of "just getting started" or "putting things on the table." This implies that establishing the ground rules is not as important as doing the substantive tasks of the group.

Regarding *how ground rules are used*, there are four problems:

- Ground rules are misunderstood or not applied consistently.
- Deviations from ground rules are handled heavy-handedly.
- There is no recognition of tensions between certain rules.
- There is no agreed-on process for revising the rules.

An example of the first problem is the lack of a clear understanding of one popular rule, "Make decisions by consensus." Does consensus mean 100 percent agreement with every detail of a solution or an agreement? Does it mean "Well, I can live with it"? How is consensus different from a series of compromises that people grudgingly support as a complete package? The implicit tension in using consensus decision making is between completing a task within a specified period and taking the time needed to seek understanding and creatively craft an agreement that genuinely satisfies everyone.

Finally, there is the matter of *what ordinary ground rules don't do*. Many ground rules are formal, limited, and prohibitive, describing what group members *cannot* do rather than affirming what they *should* do. "Don't interrupt" is an example of a basic communication rule that falls short of ensuring productive exchanges. Having rules that function as guardrails, keeping people away from danger, is certainly useful. However, this approach to ground rules does not necessarily propel a group toward its destination.

A second shortcoming of ground rules is that they don't acknowledge diversity. Most have evolved from a Western tradition that emphasizes efficiency and individuality. However, in today's workplaces and communities, diverse cultural and racial representation is not uncommon. Two typical rules, "Speak only for yourself" and "Make 'I' statements," would strike people in some cultures as inappropriate and ego-centered, violating their cultural norm of giving greater weight to the community's views than to any individual's perspective.

A third aspect of what common ground rules don't do relates to a group's assets and opportunities. The word "rules" connotes standards and strictures to avoid disorder and harm. Ordinary rules direct people away from being inspired or looking for new benefits of collective action. As described later, there is a way to rethink ground rules as shared expectations and jointly created values and aspirations.

A lack of focus on outcomes is another disconnection between ground rules and the group's values. Too often, ground rules are introduced and applied with almost no explicit link to underlying principles. Fortunately the Institute's training of facilitators and group leaders always focuses on the underlying principles for particular ground rules.

Reaching for Higher Ground

As my book coauthors and I reflected on what we have individually done with groups to help them work together effectively, we realized that one of the most potent metaphors for complex negotiations—finding common ground—did not capture all of what we observed. Finding common ground can be like two explorers separated by high weeds and vines hacking their way toward a center point: they know a "middle" or "compromise" ground exists, and they find it by moving toward one another.

Our vision is for the explorers to climb a tree before charting a course that brings them together. From the higher vantage point, they might learn that a straight line to a midway point would take them into a swamp. Their viewpoint allows them to see a different course. That course might call for one or both of them to travel farther in order to meet, but the journey might be safer and easier. Similarly, in helping groups the three of us were taking a different vantage point, away from the direct compromise and toward a "higher" clearer approach to tasks and problems. Thus we chose the metaphor of "reaching for

Table 1. **Level of Attention and Commitment to Shared Expectations Needed for Higher Ground**

	Low Effort	Medium Effort	High Effort
Group diversity	Homogenous	Some diversity	Highly diverse
Duration of group	Short-term	Medium-term	Lasting
Complexity of task	Simple, clear task	Medium complexity	Very complex
Group size	Small	Medium	Large
Significance of issue(s)	Low	Fairly significant	Great significance
Level of trust	High	Uneven	Substantial distrust
Power distribution	Equal	Somewhat disparate	Highly stratified
Level of aspirations	Low	Medium	High

Source: E. Franklin Dukes, Marina A. Piscolish, & John B. Stephens, Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities 146 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Sept. 2000). Copyright © 2000 by Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104. This material is used by permission of Jossey-Bass, Inc., a subsidiary of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

higher ground" (RHG) to characterize what we were seeing in our work and the work of others.

The RHG metaphor emphasizes six components of what many groups need in order to achieve. RHG calls on a group to seek the high road, or (1) *principled ground*. Truth telling and truth seeking are honored, integrity is valued, and trust is given because it is earned. RHG calls for moving beyond ground rules created to ensure a lowest common denominator for group interaction. It focuses on principled behavior for solid, meaningful relationships.

Like seeing clearly above the weeds and the vines, RHG means finding (2) *new ground* as well as (3) *a place of enlarged perspective*. The newness comes from discovery of a stronger vantage point by learning more about one's own needs, the group's capabilities, and new, creative options. As one can see more, there is a wider, more inclusive perspective from which to seek agreement.

Under RHG, higher ground acts as (4) *a refuge*, a safe haven from the incivility and outright nastiness that too often accompany conflict. That higher ground must be (5) *shared ground*, though. Unlike the sailor's crow's nest, which shelters only one or two from the waves below, RHG must operate like a mountain-climbing team, helping each member reach the summit. It cannot work with one person standing on—and keeping down—many so that only the leader reaches a pinnacle of achievement. Finally, RHG is (6) *a continuing challenge*. Moving uphill takes energy and is tiring, and climbers risk slipping and falling.[5]

Anyone can paint an appealing picture of hard work, harmony, and achievement that moves a work team, a city council, or a community group not only forward but upward. The real question is How can this work? What are the practical pieces of RHG?

Shared Expectations: The Six Keys to Success

Six common stepping-stones make RHG work: establish the need; educate and inspire; envision desired outcomes; promote full participation; be accountable; and evaluate and revise. The steps are offered in one logical order. However, because groups differ, the steps may be better addressed in another order. Using the stepping-stones is like learning a second language. Learners will vary in the ease or difficulty with which they comprehend various components of the language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and noun and verb forms, and acquire reading and speaking skills. The stepping-stones all must be explored and used but possibly in different orders or degrees depending on the nature of the group.

Establish the need. As noted earlier, one reason that typical ground rules often achieve less than desired is that the need for such guidelines is assumed or enforced, rather than discovered by the group itself. Worse, many people view such guidelines as benign or useless. Taking some time to focus on why ground rules and higher shared expectations are needed is important. Here are two ways to accomplish that: (1) Using Table 1, a group can see which characteristics are likely to make reaching agreements and solving problems more challenging, thus learning why concerted efforts on shared aspirations, principles, and specific ground rules are necessary. (2) The chair of a committee can cite past problems or challenges of the committee and explain how jointly developed methods for working together would have helped ease or avoid those problems.

Educate and inspire. It is important for a group to work on its principles and learn how other durable groups use covenants and shared expectations to engage their hopes and hearts as they do business. Inspiration means not merely well chosen and beautiful words but examples and challenges for people to learn from one another and appreciate the strength of different perspectives.

Many people want "to get down to business" and may not welcome this second stepping-stone of RHG. Critics may consider it too "touchy-feely" or not sufficiently attentive to rational approaches to problems, or possibly naïve about clashing political interests. The step may be deferred, or taken in smaller bites over several meetings. For example, at its first meeting, a group might propose and use a provisional set of ground rules. Then, before the second meeting, group members would each define one or two key principles or features of an especially effective committee or task force on which they had worked. In this way the substantive work could start, but the

group still could build a shared set of principles as part of the second (and possibly the third) meeting.

In another approach the group can review a different group's "covenant"—that is, its statements of aspirations and principles and its ground rules—and have its own members identify a few items relevant to the tasks it faces. This approach could be conducted in 20–40 minutes, depending on group size. If the group is going to work together over several months and through a dozen meetings or more, this is a modest investment.

Envision desired outcomes. For each of the stepping-stones, *Reaching for Higher Ground* includes a section called "From the Toolbox" that describes specific techniques. For "Envision desired outcomes," here is one such tool:

> *Have members of the group individually and silently complete the phrase, "This group will be a roaring success if our product is. . . ." Then compare the results and compile the replies by general categories (such as particular outcomes, how outsiders view the group, how long the group takes to finish its work, or the durability of the outcome).*[6]

(For another tool to put this stepping-stone in place, see the sidebar on this page.)

Promote full participation. There are many pressures to compromise on the scope of participation—for example, the apparent urgency to reach a decision and discomfort in hearing from dissenting voices. Time and again, the fuller and more engaged the participation in the group is, the stronger the results will be in both concrete accomplishments and relations among group members. Here are two more tools from "From the Toolbox":[7]

- *If you are concerned about unequal power among group members or about quiet versus talkative members, use Post-it Notes to record ideas, then arrange them in an affinity diagram, where you group like items together.*
- *At various times, go around the table one person at a time and invite people to offer ideas orally. No comments are allowed until all ideas are shared.*

A Tool for Envisioning Desired Outcomes

Worksheet: Aspirations, Guidelines, and Dos and Don'ts

- When I envision how we should best work together, my highest *aspirations* are . . .
- To make these aspirations come alive, the *principles* and *practices* we must follow are . . .
- To enact these principles, we agree to the following *duties* and *behaviors*:
- *Categories to consider*

  Participation

  Use of information

  Decision making

  Confidentiality

  Use of time

  Roles in group

  Other

Source: E. Franklin Dukes, Marina A. Piscolish, & John B. Stephens, Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities 92 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Sept. 2000). Copyright © 2000 by Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104. This material is used by permission of Jossey-Bass, Inc., a subsidiary of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Be accountable. Explicit, jointly created ground rules and aspirations lead to clear ways of judging individual and group behavior. Accountability is especially important in bringing more powerful group leaders into full but equal participation in a group. Such equality can be a breath of fresh air to those who have felt disempowered in groups. An illustration of accountability follows in the next section.

Evaluate and revise. A group's development and well-being depend on its changing the ground rules to fit its growth. Specific tools to make this step work include group "pit stops" to consider changes or additions to the ground rules. For example:

> *Have each group member identify one ground rule they would like to modify or delete. Next, have each person identify a possible new ground rule. Instead of focusing on the specific changes, use the two lists of rules to focus on how the ideas relate to the desired outcome or general principles of the group. Encourage reflection on how all the "uncontested" ground rules fit with the vision or desired outcome, and how people see the potential changes as strengthening their ability to reach their goals. Only then should you turn to the specific ideas to change the ground rules.*[8]

The Principles at Work in Government Settings

To illustrate the features and stepping-stones of RHG in state government settings, two stories follow. The first provides a strong example of the benefits of RHG work in a group but comes from outside North Carolina. The second comes from within the state. Both occurred among advocates working in a very political environment on high-profile issues before state legislatures.

Parity of Insurance Benefits for Mental Health Disorders

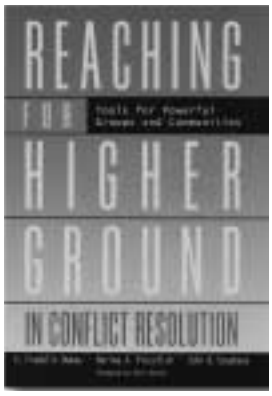
In the mid-1990s a state legislature referred a bill mandating parity between mental and physical health benefits to a special advisory commission and charged

it with developing recommendations for the following legislative session. The commission established an Insurance Parity Task Force consisting of representatives from insurance companies, the business community, mental health advocacy groups, mental health service providers, legislators, and state agencies. One of my book coauthors, E. Franklin Dukes, and a co-mediator worked with the task force.

At the first meeting, Dukes and his colleague offered some ground rules for the task force's work, which emphasized consensus. Dukes and his colleague soon found that some members expected to use majority rule rather than consensus. Outside the meetings, Dukes also heard that some task force members thought the scope and the presentation of the ground rules to be overbearing and even patronizing. In the end the task force did adopt consensus as one of its ground rules, with a specific understanding of what consensus meant and why it was important to the desired outcome of the task force.

The value of this apparently "overbearing" attention to ground rules was confirmed as the task force was completing its work. After eight meetings of the full group, work in three subcommittees, and many telephone and face-to-face discussions, a set of agreements seemed to be finalized. Unfortunately a task force member absent from the final meeting raised substantial objections to one of the eight areas of agreement, and he made clear his intent to withhold support from the whole report. Most task force members refused to consider any changes. They thought that the group could bypass the objector, yet call the report a consensus set of recommendations.

Dukes reminded the task force of its own standard on consensus. He noted not only that an "end run" would violate the group's policy and the spirit of collaboration that had developed in the task force, but also that implementing the recommendations with a key member of the task force actively opposed would likely be difficult. One group member went to the objector to explore what new language was needed to meet his needs, yet not undermine the agreements developed by the task force. The objector sought not only to clarify some slightly ambiguous language (in this case deliberately ambiguous, because of continuing differences in the task force) but also to advance a view that ultimately was preferred by the whole group. The revised report was enthusiastically adopted by the task force, fully endorsed by the legislative advisory commission, and easily adopted by the state legislature.



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In this case the task force members' agreement to seek consensus not only suggested but demanded that they find new ground when impasse was threatened. With prompting by the mediators, the group was accountable to its ground rules, and the consensus rule had a direct impact on the desired outcome: all major interests supporting one piece of legislation. Similarly, even with the frustration of having one person threaten the work of the whole, further efforts to ensure full participation helped create a stronger outcome than the group had devised without the absent member.

Negotiation among North Carolina Public Health Advocates

Following settlement of the multistate suit against tobacco manufacturers, the North Carolina Coalition for a Health Trust Fund sought to have a large portion of the monies allocated to North Carolina placed in a charitable foundation whose purpose would be to improve the health and wellness of the people of the state. The RHG idea of a group moving to something new and stronger than what people initially bring to the table struck a chord with Peg O'Connell, one of the active participants in the sixty-group coalition and chair of North Carolina Prevention Partners. Said O'Connell, "Groups don't have to work toward the lowest common denominator. I was heartened by the basic principle that higher ground was possible. One could reach for something not equally distasteful but something that could be embraced."[9] Nonetheless, O'Connell noted, the highly charged political environment surrounding tobacco and health concerns constrained how much RHG could emerge within the coalition, compared with work groups or task forces having greater distance from pending legislation or working on other health issues.

Desired outcomes: From a weak compromise to a solid agreement. Creation of a mission statement for the coalition was not a simple, straightforward endeavor. The situation was very challenging: There were strong and differing personalities in the group, and there was significant wariness or distrust because members saw one another as competitors for the same pot of money. Further, some coalition members came from groups that had worked on tobacco-related health concerns for a long time, whereas others represented organizations focused on a broader range of health and wellness needs. Finally, some group members were experienced in the legislative/political arena, while others were involved in grassroots advocacy or direct health services.

"We drafted a very broad mission statement [see page 42] so the representatives at the table could get their organizations and legislators on board," O'Connell relates. "The statement did not excite people, but they could hold their noses and accept it. At least it was a starting point and something that everyone could agree to."[10]

"We had worked hard on preventing tobacco use for years, with no state funding," commented Sally Malek, director of the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. "When the tobacco settlement came along, we saw it as the first real opportunity for state government resources for reducing tobacco use. Although the settlement came about due to the high health costs of tobacco use, there were many competing priorities. In order to get funds at all, we needed to work within a broader health coalition, and with a mission statement broader than tobacco-

use prevention. We saw it as a necessary compromise."[11]

Political pressures. Not until there were external demands that settlement monies also be directed to tobacco allotment holders (people "licensed" to grow a maximum amount of tobacco) and to tobacco-dependent communities did the mission statement serve to unite the members of the health coalition. The coalition had anticipated that, of the total tobacco-settlement monies coming to the state, the North Carolina General Assembly would allocate 50 percent for health and 50 percent for economic development. In summer 1999 the General Assembly allocated 50 percent for economic development for tobacco-dependent communities and industries, 25 percent to tobacco allotment holders, and only 25 percent for health. And it soon became evident that this 25 percent was at risk. Hurricane Floyd's devastation of much of eastern North Carolina in September 1999 raised the possibility that the state legislature would take all the health money and use it for flood relief.

Maintaining at least the 25 percent level became a rallying point for the group. O'Connell relates, "This position [25 percent for health] became the higher ground people could buy in to. The mission statement had gone from distasteful to wonderful. There still were some tensions among some groups' representatives, but everyone did commit to the 25 percent goal and worked hard to make it a reality." O'Connell adds that there were feelings of both compromise and collaboration as the coalition worked on its own differences and responded to other groups' demands for a part of the tobacco-settlement monies.[12]

A final phase tested the coalition. Some members were asked to join outside organizations' legislative efforts to obtain a portion of the tobacco-settlement monies. Doing so would have separated them from the coalition. Malek believes that the development of understanding, respect, and mutual accountability led those members to tell their coalition partners of the efforts of outsiders to form alliances with only some members of the coalition. The members stayed in the coalition rather than pursue those potential outside alliances. Malek reflects, "This is still a work in progress. We learned a lot about managing different needs and interests in a way that can support higher ground for the long term. Many of the interests represented in the coalition will need to work together effectively after the members of the health trust board are appointed by the governor and legislative leaders."[13]

Lessons: The importance of using RHG principles. O'Connell reflects on what she learned about RHG from the health coalition effort:[14]

- *The need for ground rules linked to a group's mission:* The coalition might have worked better if it had created an explicit set of ground rules in addition to the mission statement. "We could have done better creating common expectations for work in the coalition and reducing some of the personal clashes," O'Connell thinks.

- *The applicability of teamwork ideas to political coalitions:* RHG builds on the trend in the corporate world for more team-based work and on the need to combine expertise to get to good solutions. "Everything we do is an exercise in group dynamics and seeking agreement," O'Connell says. "Paraphrasing James Madison, 'We live in a world of competing factions.' It is very hard having five or ten sides—let alone fifty—trying to get what they want. You can either lock heads and make it as difficult as possible, or find groups that do want to try to work together effectively."

- *Leadership in a collaborative context:* O'Connell notes that collaboration does not mean avoiding having a leader for a group. The coalition's push in 2000 depended on a well-led, focused effort. She credits Chris Hoke, legislative liaison from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, with helping get the coalition focused and advocating a simple, persuasive goal (a clear "desired outcome," in RHG language). Hoke remarks, "The group did need someone to serve as a catalyst or leader. I certainly was not a leader in the sense of making a decision and getting others to follow it. Instead, I emphasized that success depended on each member repeating the mission statement in every contact with state legislators."[15]

- *Action, not talk:* O'Connell believes that although the RHG metaphor and guidelines are useful, in a political environment many people are more oriented to hard-nosed deal making. She says, "Use the concepts and techniques of RHG, but don't take time talking about 'higher ground' because many people will assume it is too touchy-feely or unrealistic."

- *Upcoming opportunities to use more of RHG:* O'Connell notes that the chal-

Higher Ground Reached by the North Carolina Coalition for a Health Trust Fund

Mission Statement

Twenty-five percent of the Tobacco Settlement Funds shall be placed in a charitable foundation, the purpose of which shall be to improve the health and wellness of the people of North Carolina.

The Foundation shall fund initiatives that include but are not limited to research, education, prevention and treatment of health problems in North Carolina, and to increase capacity of communities to respond to the public's health needs.

The Foundation shall develop a comprehensive, community-based plan to fund initiatives with priority on preventing, reducing and remedying the health effects of tobacco use with an emphasis on reducing youth tobacco use.

In all endeavors, the Foundation shall place a priority on the health needs of vulnerable and underserved populations and shall provide assistance in addressing those needs.

Source: Available at http://www.ncpreventionpartners.org/tobaccoprev/coalition.htm.

Higher Ground on Environmental Management, Reached by the Nation's Governors

ENLIBRA Principles

National Standards, Neighborhood Solutions—Assign Responsibilities at the Right Level

Collaboration, Not Polarization—Use Collaborative Processes to Break Down Barriers and Find Solutions

Reward Results, Not Programs—Move to a Performance-Based System

Science for Facts, Process for Priorities—Separate Subjective Choices from Objective Data Gathering

Markets Before Mandates—Replace Command and Control with Economic Incentives, Whenever Appropriate

Change a Heart, Change a Nation—Ensure Environmental Understanding

Recognition of Benefits and Costs—Make Sure Environmental Decisions Are Fully Informed

Solutions Transcend Political Boundaries—Use Appropriate Geographic Boundaries for Environmental Problems

Source: As summarized in E. Franklin Dukes, Marina A. Piscolish, & John B. Stephens, Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities 204–5 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Sept. 2000). Copyright © 2000 by Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104. This material is used by permission of Jossey-Bass, Inc., a subsidiary of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

lenge of better addressing health needs in North Carolina now moves to how the board of the health trust will operate. "The RHG principles can be helpful in avoiding the pain of the work the coalition did on legislative matters," says O'Connell. "I'm looking at this as the board of the health trust is selected and starts its work. I keep asking, How can the various groups in the public health community move forward without having so much dissatisfaction along the way?"

Other Promising RHG Applications

RHG has shown promise in some other situations across the United States. Some brief illustrations follow.

Environmental Management in the West

In the many skirmishes or outright wars over environmental and economic needs in the western United States, two governors sought a better way to frame the array of issues. Governor Mike Leavitt (R–Utah) and Governor John Kitzhaber (D–Oregon) worked together on a set of environmental management principles that they termed ENLIBRA (see above). My book coauthors and I see these principles as consistent with the general metaphor of RHG and as illustrative of the steps related to identifying general aspirations and needs to guide specific group decisions.

The ENLIBRA principles have been adopted by the Western Governors Association (WGA) and the National Governors Association (NGA). Additionally the WGA and NGA resolutions adopting the principles cite a variety of inter- and intra-state examples of collaborative, innovative approaches to environmental issues, such as air pollution in the Grand Canyon, drinking-water supply in Texas, salmon habitats in Oregon, and trail access in Alaska.[16]

In North Carolina the ENLIBRA principles were introduced in spring 2000 to the Stormwater Management Stakeholders Initiative, twenty-eight representatives who sought agreement on how to implement new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules for stormwater management. The group worked for five months and produced a majority report, but it is unclear to what degree the group used the ENLIBRA principles to guide its efforts.

Creation of a New City Charter

At the municipal government level, a strong example of RHG was provided when Chelsea, Massachusetts, created a new city charter in the 1990s. The town of 28,000 in the Boston area included second- and third-generation Americans of eastern European descent and a substantial proportion of recent Hispanic and Asian immigrants. Corruption and mismanagement had led to the state putting Chelsea into receivership in 1990.

The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process used a mediation team to develop a variety of ways to involve a wide range of citizens. Beyond interviewing formal and informal community leaders, the team trained Chelsea citizens as facilitators to run some forty-five community meetings. Surveys and public forums were supplemented with English- and Spanish-language newsletters, call-in cable TV programs, and a telephone hotline. The effort yielded wide citizen participation and 60 percent support when the new charter was voted on in a referendum.

Both the process and the outcome of the city charter effort reflect the need for explicit shared expectations about how a community wants to be governed. Many aspects of RHG—a principled, safe, new, and enlarged perspective—were part of the Chelsea Charter Consensus Process.[17]

Core Values for Public Participation

Many people who are responsible for citizen involvement processes face pressures to turn away from openness, inclusiveness, and a fair opportunity for citizens to express concerns, toward public relations, the hard sell, and withholding of relevant, often critical information from stakeholders. The International Association for Public Participation has responded by preparing a list of seven core values for public participation (see page 44). Although the values are very general guidelines that require specific

Higher Ground Promoted by the International Association for Public Participation

Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
4. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
6. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.
7. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Source: Available at http://www.iap2.org/coreofvalues.html.

discussion and application, in 1996 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee found them compelling and adopted them as part of its Model Plan for Participation. It then used the principles to develop a more specific checklist for public participation relevant to environmental issues.[18]

Conclusion

Amid the contention, the uncertainty, and the sometimes great distrust among political foes, RHG appears at first glance to be a pipe dream. Nonetheless, my *Reaching for Higher Ground* coauthors and I are heartened by the many public officials who are finding value in both the general vision of RHG and the specific stepping-stones and techniques to make it real. More important, as examples from North Carolina and several other places show, there is a growing recognition that reaching for principled agreements and moving from basic ground rules to broader and more durable shared expectations are what is truly called for to create community out of conflict.

Notes

1. E. Franklin Dukes, Marina A. Piscolish, & John B. Stephens, Reaching for Higher Ground in Conflict Resolution: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Sept. 2000). The book is available from the Institute of Government's Publications Sales Office.

2. Roger M. Schwarz, The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994). Schwarz subsequently reduced the ground-rules list from sixteen to ten.

3. On selecting and working with a facilitator: Roger M. Schwarz, *A Consumer's Guide to Hiring and Working with a Group Facilitator,* Popular Gov't, Spring 1994, p. 12, Reprint No. 94.08C; Schwarz, The Skilled Facilitator.

On governing board retreats: Kurt J. Jenne, *Governing Board Retreats*, Popular Gov't, Winter 1988, p. 21, Reprint No. 88.13B.

On strategic planning and visioning: Phillip Boyle, *A Map, a Compass, Asking for Directions, and Visioning: Organizational Tools for Navigating the Future*, Popular Gov't, Summer 2000, p. 21; Kurt J. Jenne, *From Vision to Reality: Effective Planning by the Governing Board*, Popular Gov't, Summer 1988, p. 33, Reprint No. 88.13E; Kurt J. Jenne, *Strategic Planning: Taking Charge of the Future*, Popular Gov't, Spring 1986, p. 36, Reprint No. 90.14C.

On organizational change and group effectiveness: Margaret S. Carlson, *A Model for Improving a Group's Effectiveness*, Popular Gov't, Summer 1998, p. 37; Anne S. Davidson & Richard R. McMahon, *One City's Journey toward More Responsive Government: Laurinburg, North Carolina*, Popular Gov't, Winter 1999, p. 12; Roger M. Schwarz, *Managing Planned Change in Organizations*, Popular Gov't, Winter 1988, p. 13, Reprint No. 88.13A.

On public dispute resolution: John B. Stephens, *Using a Mediator in Public Disputes*, Public Management Bulletin No. 2 (Institute of Gov't, The Univ. of N.C. at Chapel Hill, Sept. 1998).

4. Some of the deficiencies apply to common uses of ground rules in North Carolina and to lists of ground rules other than those typically used by Institute of Government–trained facilitators. The whole set of weaknesses is drawn from the authors' experience across the United States, including changes in our own approach to ground rules, and from reports by mediators, facilitators, and committee members on problems encountered in typical approaches to introducing and applying ground rules.

5. This very brief summary of RHG is covered, with real-life illustrations, in chapter 4 of the book.

6. Dukes et al., Reaching for Higher Ground, 93.

7. *Id.* at 95.

8. *Id.* at 101.

9. Telephone Interview with Peg O'Connell, Chair, N.C. Prevention Partners (Dec. 7, 2000).

10. *Id.*

11. Interview with Sally Malek, director, Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, N.C. Dep't of Health and Human Serv., in Raleigh (Jan. 8, 2001).

12. Interview with O'Connell, N.C. Prevention Partners.

13. Interview with Malek, N.C. Dep't of Health and Human Serv.

14. All the quotes and the paraphrases that follow in this section are from the interview with O'Connell, N.C. Prevention Partners.

15. Interview with Chris Hoke, Director, Office of Intergovernmental Relations, N.C. Dep't of Health and Human Serv., in Raleigh (Jan. 8, 2001).

16. The WGA's resolution is available at http://www.policyconsensus.org/statements/principles_environ_mngmnt_in_the_west.html.

17. S. L. Podziba, Social Capital Formation, Public-Building and Public Mediation: The Chelsea Charter Consensus Process (Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation, 1998).

18. The model plan is available at http://es.epa.gov/oeca/oej/nejac/pdf/modelbk.pdf. The checklist appears on pages 9–11.