

**House Committee on Water
Thursday, June 10, 2021**

County Commissioners as Convenors

United Counties. United Oregon.

Panel Presenters

- Andy Smith, AOC County Solutions
- Columbia County Commissioner Margaret Macgruder
- Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage
- Deschutes County Commissioner Phil Chang
- Karmen Fore, Oregon Solutions, NPCC

AOC: Fundamentals of Convening

- Creating a **neutral forum** for collaborative problem solving that affords participants an impartial environment for discussion and resolution of issues.
- In order to create a neutral form that will be credible with stakeholders and the public, conveners and facilitators need to **follow a set of principles and best practices.**

AOC: Principles & Best Practices of Convening

Transparency and Accountability: all activities in a collaborative effort must be open to scrutiny in order to avoid the perception that more powerful stakeholders are manipulating the process. Those leading and supporting the collaboration must be accountable to the whole group.

Equity and Inclusiveness: All stakeholders who are affected by the issue at hand must be included. Stakeholders are identified through conducting an assessment prior to convening. If a process does not or cannot include all those affected, the convening should not proceed.

Effectiveness and Efficiency: A collaborative convening process must be determined to be the most likely means of resolving a problem and achieving the desired results. If it is not, an alternative process such as legislation, policy change, or litigation should be pursued. This can be determined through the assessment prior to convening.

Consensus Decision Making: All decisions must be by a consensus of all parties. This ensures that everyone's interests are addressed rather than allowing a majority view to prevail.

Forum Neutrality: Stakeholders must be able to trust that the forum will be fair and that no person or position will be favored over another.

Excerpts from Convenor Training provided to Commissioners at AOC County College:

“Before you are ready to use the forum to reach collaborative agreements an assessment must be done to ensure that all interested parties are invited and are willing and able to come to the table before you proceed.”

“Engage a wide variety of people from different perspectives. If important players are left out, any solutions the group develops will be suspect and almost surely fail.”

“Being impartial means including people you may not like.”

“Meet in a neutral place like a to ensure an impartial process, if helpful -- e.g. community centers, community colleges, and universities can work.”

“When the issue is complex and divisive, it helps to get assistance from an experienced facilitator in planning and conducting the process.”

“Participants must legitimately believe the convener is not going to favor one side and rather that the convener is trying to find a solution that all sides can embrace.”

“Being impartial is difficult and takes practice. If you can’t be impartial in a particular case, don’t play the Convenor role or find a Co-Convenor who represents the other side.”

Unique Convening Authority of County Commissioners

County Commissioners have a unique, local convening authority that enables them to bring people together to solve problems given that they have been elected to serve as leaders in their community.

Conveners may have opinions about an issue, but in deciding to convene a collaborative process and get others involved in solving it, the convener needs to adhere to the principles and best practices of convening, most notably neutrality and inclusiveness.

Goals of Local Water Forums to Be Conducted in 2021-22

Purpose: There is a need to provide local and regional forums to identify water needs in a comprehensive manner that will accomplish the following objectives.

Priority setting is not part of this initial phase.

1. Engage all stakeholders in identifying their respective water needs at the local county level
2. Provide a forum for mutual stakeholder education about water needs
3. Provide a base of information for future local and regional water planning
4. Develop a broad base of support for needed water investments for the 2023 Legislative Session.

Commissioner Convening Efforts: Water

Commissioners: Water Convenors Cohort

Les Perkins (Hood River): Convening water stakeholders in the Hood River Valley for five years

Phil Chang (Deschutes): involved as a participant in multiple water stakeholder efforts in the Deschutes Basin

Donna Beverage (Union): Convening the place based water pilot in Union Co for 4 years

Kati Jacobson (Lincoln): Lincoln County place based water pilot convener for a year but also experience as an expert facilitator for the Extension Service

David Yamamoto (Tillamook): Convening stakeholders in the Tillamook basin for 4 years around multiple water issues

Margaret Magruder (Columbia): former Watershed Council Director and Chair of AOC Natural Resources Committee

Craig Pope (Polk): long time place based water advocate; OCF water grant convener

AOC Alumni: Water Conveners Cohort

Dennis Doherty (Umatilla): Co-Convened the Umatilla CRUST project successful multi-stakeholder agreement

Mark Owens (Harney): Convened the Harney Basin place based pilot project for 3 years

Commissioners as Convenors: A Few Examples Beyond Water

- **Tillamook Basin flooding reduction project:** Mark Labhart (Tillamook)
- **North Bend Airport:** Nikki Whitty (Coos)
- **Multnomah Dike:** Jules Bailey (Multnomah)
- **Community College shooting recovery:** Tim Freeman (Douglas)
- **Oregon Coast Trail:** Melissa Cribbins (Coos), Dave Hunt (Lincoln), Bill Baertlein/Erin Skaar (Tillamook)
- **Sudden Oak Death:** David Brock-Smith (Curry); Melissa Cribbins (Coos)
- **Vernonia School siting and construction following a devastating flood:** Tony Hyde (Columbia, first as Mayor and then as Commissioner)

Questions about Convening?

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