Conflict Styles & Constructive Dialogue: Tools from Convergence's Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach
Webinar Overview for Michigan Association of Counties | June 2025

Conflict is an inevitable part of leadership and community work — but how we approach it can mean the difference between division and meaningful progress. In this interactive one-hour session, we'll explore practical tools for identifying your own conflict style, navigating challenging personalities, and reframing tough conversations into opportunities for collaboration. You'll also learn how Convergence's nationally recognized Collaborative Problem-Solving process can be used to bridge divides, build trust, and create understanding across differences in your public meetings.

The session will be facilitated by **Mariah Levison**, President & CEO of Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, and **Gabriel Herrera**, Director of Programs. Mariah brings more than 15 years of experience in dialogue, mediation, and public engagement, with a deep focus on helping groups in conflict find common ground. Gabriel is a dialogue facilitator with nearly a decade of experience in conflict coaching, mediation, and collaborative problem-solving – bringing diverse voices together to navigate complex challenges.

I. Welcome & Framing (5 min)
- Welcome, facilitator introductions, overview of session objectives, agenda
- Brief introductions (*as time permits via chat*)
- Framing: Conflict is natural — how we engage with it matters

II. Introduction to Convergence & Collaborative Problem-Solving (10 min)
- About Convergence: Bridging divides to solve problems
- Overview of the Collaborative Problem-Solving Process
    - Discovery & Design
    - Building Trust & Shared Understanding
    - Co-Creation of Higher-Ground Solutions
- Applications: City councils, public engagement, community initiatives
- Poll in chat*: Where could this process help in your work?

III. Understanding Conflict Styles (10 min)
- Introduction to Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)
    - Conflict styles: Competitive, Collaborative, Accommodative, Avoidant, Compromising
- Drop link in chat: Online conflict style assessment (*for participants to do after session on own*)
- Discussion (verbal and chat): Pros/cons of each conflict style. Prompts: In which situation does a given conflict style work best? Which style do you most identify with?

IV. Strategies for Navigating Challenging Personalities (25 min)
1. Active Listening & Identifying Needs
- **Skills Overview:**
  - Radical listening
  - Validating, summarizing, reflecting
  - Learning to identify the difference between positions and underlying interests
- **Examples Presentation:** When someone is being combative, what might be underneath?
- **Interactive Practice:** Short scenario, discussion, workshop possible skills application (chat or verbal discussion)

2. Redirecting & Reframing
- **Skills Overview:**
  - Strategies to reframe and redirect toward more constructive conversations
  - Techniques to pivot or end unproductive dialogue
- **Workshop Scenario:** Group brainstorm: How would you reframe, redirect, or pivot? (chat or verbal discussion)

V. Applying These Tools in Real-Life Contexts (5 min)
- **Case Study:** Real example from a Convergence workshop (e.g., NLC bipartisan coalition, etc.)

VI. Closing & Next Steps (5 min)
- **Prompt:** "Where in your work could you apply one of these tools next week?" (chat and/or private reflection)
- **Resources & Additional Learning:**
  - Connecting Questions Handout
  - Collaborative Problem-Solving Handout
  - Links to additional tools and resources
- **Feedback link in chat**

Participant Materials (linked or distributed pre/post-session):
- **Conflict Style Assessment: Thomas Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)** https://kilmanndiagnostics.com/assessments/thomas-kilmann-instrument-one-assessment-person/
- **Connecting Questions Handout:** https://convergencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/JSMF-Connecting-Questions-.pdf
- **Collaborative Problem-Solving Handout:** https://convergencepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Collaborative-Problem-Solving-Resource.pdf
- **Supplemental Resources:** https://convergencepolicy.org/learning-lab/collaborative-problem-solving-inclusive-prosperity-partnership-workshop/