

Beginner's Guide to Environmental Mediation

by Dr. Garry M. Keegan, 2021

As more and more large companies aim to complete their projects in an entirely eco-friendly and socially-responsible way, now's the time to take a real vested interest in dispute resolution with local stakeholders - especially when it comes to environmental concerns.

For those involved directly in the delivery of infrastructure and urban development in proximity to local populations, this is key to build not only financially successful projects, but also environmentally and "community-friendly" projects.

Local or host community acceptance has always been a constraint for the development of infrastructure, sometimes making or breaking a project proposal, or often leading to fractured relationships between project promoters and local communities.

This is where the structured approach of 'Environmental Mediation' comes into play.

What is Environmental Mediation?

Environment Mediation is a well-established method for solving environmental, urban, and territorial conflicts in private or public spaces, national or international, often involving a range of parties from several sectors with different, and sometimes incompatible interests.

The method is sub-field of dispute resolution - with an already substantial amount of literature documenting case studies, mediation techniques, and processes - beginning to gain real traction at the international *and* local level.

It aims at establishing dialogue, mutual understanding and, if possible, agreements between affected parties, often including government entities, as well as local stakeholders.

What are the Benefits of Environmental Mediation?

This method of dispute resolution aims to promote dialogue and debate in a professional and impartial manner, establishing group dynamics in discussion, planning, and decision-making processes in order to develop common and consensual proposals.

Clear benefits of Environmental Mediation as a method of dispute resolution include:

- creating a more effective and rational result, usually in a relatively short space of time.
- Avoiding disagreements escalating into more destructive conflict.
- being substantially cheaper than attempting to navigate legal disputes.

Developing Trust and Understanding

Environmental Mediation allows the participants to speak openly and realistically about issues in dispute – both the pros and cons – enabling informed decisions based on potential risks and benefits.

Frank conversations such as these rarely occur as part of formal legal disputes and may in fact help to build trust and understanding among the participants, perhaps even avoiding any potential for further conflicts down the line.

For example; Grid development is facing considerable challenges in the immediate future. Organised stakeholders can make siting a locally unwanted transmission line an extremely difficult process.

Community acceptance has been a key constraint to the development of onshore wind. Offshore wind projects also experience resistance among coastal and port communities. Solar power is encountering similar resistance.

Whether a project is single or multi-site, it will in many cases involve the siting of a facility close to a local population. There are examples in every country of environmental public policy and private projects that have proved to be very controversial. Depending on the project promoter, some extent of public participation needs to take place.

If you would like to know more about Environmental Mediation, as well as dispute resolution in general, why not consider training by IPC? www.ipc10.com

IPC Training increases the capacity to address successfully challenges associated with siting controversial infrastructure projects. A better understanding of the role of community gain programmes will assist policy makers and those stakeholders tasked with the delivery of large energy, transport, communications and other infrastructure projects.

Upon completion of IPC Training, you will have a good knowledge and appreciation of how to successfully engage with local stakeholders adjacent to projects where you are involved.

Our training will add value to your skillset. It will better prepare you for engaging with difficult local stakeholders.

No matter where you work in the world, the same principles apply in engaging with local stakeholders. Our course will give you great confidence as you encounter local resistance, and for when you are being considered to deliver an important infrastructure project.