

Facilitation Guide

Conflict Resolution Part 2: The Assembly's Role in Managing Conflict

An Assembly Development Module Workshop



“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization.

“ . . . Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the function of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believer’s capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá’í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message to the
Bahá’ís of the World, 1996



Conflict Resolution Part 2: The Assembly's Role in Managing Conflict

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Purpose:

- ★ To examine the dynamics and stages of conflict
- ★ To recognize ways in which the Assembly can manage conflicts at different stages

Note: You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá'í Distribution Service prior to the workshop or downloaded from the administrative website www.usbnc.org. You will also want to obtain a copy of the Handouts for yourself.

This workshop builds on material covered in “Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual.” It examines the dynamics and stages of conflict and also explores the roles and options open to Assemblies managing conflict and dealing with disruptive individuals. The workshop contains opportunities to apply principles to specific conflict situations.

When facilitated with a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly, this workshop will require nearly 4 1/2 hours for the core material plus additional time for each optional extension. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back.

What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing quotations from the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the workshop. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** The page you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these workshops in that process, and how to request an Assembly Development Representative to facilitate the workshops. (p. 4)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators.** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this workshop.** A listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-10)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this workshop.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 11-30)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** An overview of the mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages at the end of this Guide.)
- ★ **Evaluation Forms.** An evaluation form for the facilitator to return to the Office of Assembly Development and a form for the Assembly to complete two months after the workshop. (unnumbered page at the end of the Facilitation Guide)

The Assembly Development Process

“ . . .enabling Assemblies to rise to a ‘new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities’. . . .”

The National Spiritual Assembly focuses its Assembly Development initiatives towards facilitating the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The development process is designed to be furthered by presentation of a variety of module workshops, each module covering a distinct topic or function. Use of these workshops will help Assemblies to understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, to improve their performance, and to attain an ever advancing level of maturity as the primary institutions of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. When used with the general community, the workshops will heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions in their growth process.

The National Spiritual Assembly highly recommends that each workshop be studied with a Bahá’í facilitator who resides outside the particular Bahá’í community, although these materials may be used by Assemblies on their own. A list of Bahá’ís who serve as facilitators, called Assembly Development Representatives, is available from the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’í National Center at (847) 733-3490 or by e-mail to OAD@usbnc.org.

Assemblies may choose to study these workshops as an institution, may invite other Assemblies in their area to study together, or may invite their community to join them in exploring the modules. Workshops may also be used at Bahá’í schools or Institutes. If they are used with both Assembly members and other community members, Assemblies are encouraged to set aside follow-up time at one of their future meetings to consider the impact and implications of what was learned on their collective functioning.

Workshops in this program range from two to four hours in length with the majority averaging just over three hours. They are, however, adaptable to different timing needs. Workshops are divided into separate segments which can be selectively deleted if timing needs require this. Optional supplemental materials are also included for use if more time is available.

Guidance for Facilitators

Before the Session

Personal preparation

- ★ Take time to prepare yourself spiritually and materially to facilitate this workshop. Meditate on your role in facilitating the friends' thoughtful study and consultation. It may also be helpful to reflect on key quotations about Bahá'í consultation and education.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts in advance of the session and ponder the themes in them.
- ★ Pray for assistance. Feel confident that the Blessed Beauty will guide and confirm you as you endeavor to serve the Faith.

Preparation of the course and its materials

- ★ Become familiar with the workshop and its options and extensions.
- ★ The amount of time suggested for each segment of the workshop is a minimum only. If the number of participants in a workshop is large and many small groups will be reporting back, you will need to allow more time than the minimum to complete some segments.
- ★ If some of the participants are not proficient in English, consider ways to meet their needs. For instance, those who understand spoken English but do not read it easily could be paired with those who can read quotations aloud. These adjustments may affect the amount of time necessary to complete an activity or exercise.
- ★ Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. Determine in advance how many expansions to the module, if any, are appropriate. Some factors to consider are available time, general level of experience and deepening of the participants, and local interest in a particular topic.
- ★ Have materials (such as a few extra handouts, art supplies, extra pens and pencils, small gift item) ready for each participant. It is wise to have slightly more of everything than you anticipate needing in case a larger than expected group of friends attend.
- ★ If the workshop segments you will be using require cards for games or exercises, prepare these beforehand. If workshop

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

- ★ Select devotional readings, prayers, and music you will want to use and make sure you have the equipment to play any music you might have.

Preparation of the meeting room

- ★ If possible, ask to see the meeting room in advance. Arrive early to set up. Adapt the room set-up to meet your needs, if possible.
- ★ Create an inviting atmosphere of beauty, dignity, and warmth to welcome participants. Possibilities include photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, holy places or great teachers, heroines and heroes; framed quotations, decorating the walls with objects of beauty, tablecloths, arrangements of fresh or dried flowers, lighting, candles, music from diverse cultural backgrounds, bowls of potpourri or drops of rose oil, seating arrangements, and refreshments.

Creating and maintaining a spiritual environment

- ★ Warmly greet the participants. Be sure that the spirit of the Faith permeates the room. While conveying the content of the workshop is important, it is equally important that the style of interaction does not feel harsh, nervous, or rushed. Be a bringer of light to the hearts of the group.

Facilitating discussion

- ★ These workshops ask facilitators to raise several questions to the group for possible consultation. If one question fails to elicit much response, move on to another one.
- ★ Express appreciation for each participant’s contribution.
- ★ Be mindful of who has spoken and try to give everyone an opportunity to offer a first comment before giving time for individuals to offer second or third comments. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to go around the room, inviting each person to comment briefly in turn.
- ★ As groups are consulting on quotations and focus questions, go from group to group and listen in, without interrupting the consultative process. You may want to note comments or

During the Session

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

questions that arise and bring them up when the groups reassemble.

Using time

- ★ When small groups are asked to consult or work on an art project in a certain amount of time, give each group a “5-minute warning” when their time is nearly finished. This could be done either by going from group to group as a reminder or by ringing a small bell.
- ★ Be flexible and sensitive to the needs and understanding of the participants. If a particular question or point engages the group in lengthy but topic-related discussion, it may be preferable to allow participants to continue to pursue an area that intrigues them rather than to cut off discussion and move on to another point or exercise. Participants often experience exploring less material but in greater depth as more satisfying than a hurried look at many aspects of a topic.
- ★ You may choose to make the decision yourself about whether to let a group spend more time on one area and skip later exercises or activities. You may also choose to involve the group as a whole in the decision: “Since this topic is generating a lot of interest, do we want to 1) spend more time here and not explore a later topic, 2) extend the time of our session and not skip any segments, or 3) move on from this topic, go through all the following segments, and end at our original agreed-upon time?”

Dividing participants into small groups

- ★ Put stickers on participants name cards or leave cards with stickers at their place and have them group themselves according to sticker design.
- ★ Divide into groups by the month/season in which one’s birthday falls.
- ★ In theater/auditorium seating, form groups around where participants are sitting.
- ★ Create funny groupings and ask people to choose the group that best describes them (Example: people who love apples are group A; if your favorite color is blue, join group B; if Casablanca is your favorite movie, join group C.)

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

Closing the Session

- If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work together as an Assembly or work in groups composed of different Assemblies, depending on the exercise.
- If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

- ★ Provide verbal instructions on how to turn the evaluation forms in.
- ★ You may want to give a gift to each participant of a card with a beautifully lettered quotation that pertains to the workshop.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies that went through this workshop in a group larger than their own membership to have a follow-up period at an up-coming meeting to consult on what was learned and how it can be applied to their own functioning.
- ★ Suggest choosing a date and picking a topic for the next Assembly development workshop.

Please note: Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms. Give participants their Bahá'í Locality Code and explain how to fill in the forms.

After the Session

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluations to:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the
United States

Office of Assembly Development

1233 Central St.

Evanston, IL 60201

OAD@USBNC.ORG

fax. (847) 733-3486

phone (847) 733-3490

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank them for participation and include a copy of their evaluation form to fill out two months after the workshop.

Thank you for serving the Cause by facilitating this Assembly development workshop!

Highlights of Conflict Resolution Part 2: The Assembly's Role in Managing Conflict*

Objectives:

Participants will:

- ★ become familiar with the dynamics and stages of conflict
- ★ reflect on the developmental process of maturation
- ★ examine ways in which the Assembly can manage conflict at different stages
- ★ practice applying principles to specific conflict situations

Agenda outline: (total time: 4 hours and 20 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (10 minutes), p. 11
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly Development process, familiarize participants with the objectives of this module, and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.
- ★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (15 minutes), pp. 12-14
A brief overview of data relating to conflict resolution in religious communities from an interfaith survey, giving an increased appreciation for the need to move to a new stage in the exercise of Assembly responsibilities regarding conflict management.
- ★ **Recognizing the dynamics and stages of conflict** (30 minutes), pp. 15-17
A brief review of points covered in Conflict Resolution Part 1, followed by examination of a conflict cycle model and the effects of conflict on those involved.
- ★ **Maturation, conflict, and development in the Bahá'í community** (35 minutes), pp. 18-19
Small group study of the Writings and reflection on the developmental process of maturation.
- ★ **The role of the Assembly** (90 minutes), pp. 20-24
Pairs and group activities to examine the various roles the Assembly can play in regard to conflict, with particular attention to third party intervention and counseling believers in conflict.
- ★ **Dealing with disruptive individuals** (25 minutes), pp. 25-26
Individual and group reflection on the responsibility of the Assembly and options open to the Assembly.
- ★ **Case studies for consultation** (45 minutes), pp. 27-28
Small group practice in applying conflict resolution principles to the specifics of various situations.
- ★ **Closing** (10 minutes), pp. 29-30
A brief review of what has been learned, followed by inspirational quotations.

* This workshop is designed for participants who have already participated in the workshop “Conflict Resolution Part 1: Conflict and the Individual.”

Highlights, continued

Extension sessions for use if more time is available:

- ★ ***Further practice with case studies*** (variable amount of time), p. 28

Small group work on additional case studies

- ★ ***Role play*** (variable amount of time), p. 28

An opportunity to practice counseling the believers mentioned in the case studies

Times given above are minimums based on a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back. Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. If less time is available, you can skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to give as a gift to each participant*

Note: You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá'í Distribution Service prior to the workshop.

Introduction and Objectives (10 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To introduce the Assembly development process
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities

Activities

1. Brief devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer.

2. Introduction (1-2 minutes)

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development and the Assembly Development Module Workshops (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached toward the end of the Facilitation Guide). Highlight that the purpose of the workshops in the Assembly development process is to facilitate the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.
- ★ Note that a primary focus of this particular workshop is the Assembly’s role in managing conflict, whether among its own members or among members of the community.

3. Overview of objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Comment that this workshop builds on what was learned in Part 1 about the choices open to individuals in conflict.
- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this workshop and post them.
- ★ See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added.

4. Review agenda (3 minutes)

- ★ Go through the agenda, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or previously prepared flip chart.
- ★ See pages 9-10 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition: a full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

The Call to “a New State of Mind” (15 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To perceive the need to move to a new stage in the exercise of Assembly responsibilities regarding conflict

Activities:

1. Review of quotation (1 minute)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4) to refresh everyone’s memories of the importance of this concept.

2. Read passage, underline, and share (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read the second quotation on the handout and silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of this module.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.

3. Sharing of FACT data (5 minutes)

- ★ Remind participants that in the Conflict Resolution Part 1 workshop they looked at data gathered as part of FACT (Faith Communities Today), an interfaith survey in 2000, which showed that all religious communities experience conflict.
- ★ Share the following findings, some of which are included on the handout:
- ★ In his article “Conflict: Synonym for Congregation” Carl S. Dudley reported:

“In FACT – the most comprehensive study of America’s religious landscape – 75 percent of congregations reported some level of conflict in the last five years. Disagreements were reported in every aspect of church life: from theological beliefs to the way money was raised and spent, from worship practices to mission priorities, from lay decision-making to pastoral leadership styles. Decision-making was the area where conflict was most frequently reported (60 percent), but careful analysis shows that disputes over personal issues and pastoral leadership are the most emotionally intense issues. Although some level of conflict was almost universal, only one in four congregations reported conflict serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life.”

Correlating handout:

- ★ “The Call to a New State of Mind” pp. 3-4

The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

- ★ The FACT survey showed that lingering conflict is strongly associated with declining vitality and declining membership in congregations.
- ★ The data also revealed what types of conflict are most common in the Bahá’í community nationwide. In answer to the question “During the last five years has your congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts in the following areas?” over 700 Spiritual Assemblies responded as follows: (this chart is in the handouts on page 4)

Survey results on conflict in the Bahá’í community

	Bahá’í results “yes” - any	Bahá’í results “yes” - moderate or
Individual behavior	49%	38%
LSA decisions	35%	23%
Application of teachings	35%	22%
Proclamation or teaching campaign	28%	12%
Money/finances/budget	24%	11%
How worship (Feast) is conducted	23%	8%
Ethnic or racial tensions	19%	11%

- ★ When looking at strong conflict in the community, it appears that all of the above issues created conflict in a relatively small percentage of the population with the exception of the “Behavior/lifestyle of an individual Bahá’í,” which was a cause of some conflict in half of all communities and caused moderate to severe conflict in almost 40%.
- ★ Dudley’s article also spoke about the role of leadership in resolving conflict:

“Much of the observed conflict might be avoided, reduced or redirected if congregational leaders learn how to deal openly with conflict. FACT demonstrates that 80 percent of congregations considering themselves to be ‘vital and spiritually alive’ were able to ‘deal openly with conflict.’ By contrast, the congregations that are least able to manage their conflict are unlikely to be vital and alive.”

The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

- ★ Conclude by stating that the challenge to Assemblies is to learn to manage conflicts between individuals or segments of the community in ways that both:
 - resolve the concerns currently at issue
 - leave all parties feeling more unified and more spiritually vital at the end of the process
- ★ This type of conflict resolution lays the foundation for improved relationships in the future.

Recognizing the Dynamics and Stages of Conflict (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To briefly review major points covered in Conflict Resolution Part 1
- ★ To become familiar with the progression of conflicts
- ★ To perceive the role of individual choice in the resolution of conflicts

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “The Dynamics of Conflict” pp. 5-6
- ★ “Six Stages of the Conflict Cycle” p. 7
- ★ “The Conflict Choice Point and Its Consequences” pp. 8-9

Setting up the activities

- ★ As a brief review of material covered in Conflict Resolution Part 1, remind participants that they:
 - studied various passages from the Writings to establish a shared understanding of what behaviors and attitudes are forbidden by Bahá’u’lláh and learned to distinguish these from the permissible “clash of differing opinions”
 - reflected on the damaging effects of conflict
 - examined the new behaviors we are called to establish and the role that choice plays in this process
 - considered the choices open and closed to Bahá’ís in conflicts
 - learned the importance of letting go of past hurts
- ★ Remind participants that a brief mention was made of social science research about the damage that conflict inflicts on the perceptions and thinking processes of those who are engaged in it.
- ★ Explain that since an important Assembly responsibility is to counsel believers who are in conflict, this research knowledge will be explored in greater depth in order to familiarize the Assembly with these dynamics. The Assembly will be better able to assist believers to resolve conflicts if it is knowledgeable about what is likely to be going on inside of them as they talk to the Assembly.

Activities:

1. Review of a summary of social science research (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “The Dynamics of Conflict” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-6).
- ★ Point out that the first two quotations at the top of the page were discussed in the Conflict Resolution Part 1 workshop, and participants were asked to reflect on the question “How can both parties to a conflict be wrong?”

Recognizing the Dynamics and Stages of Conflict, continued

- ★ State that research is uncovering a pattern of four types of changes that occur in a progressive and predictable order in all parties to a conflict.
 - ★ Ask volunteers to read aloud the four types of changes on the remainder of the handout. After each of the four, ask participants to take a moment to remember a time they have experienced this within themselves or have seen it occur in someone else.
 - ★ Emphasize that these changes take place subtly, often unbeknownst to the affected individuals.
 - ★ *Optional: Mention that conflict resolution frequently suffers from what has sometimes been called “the attribution paradox,” with attribution referring to how we perceive the behaviors and motives of others. Social science research has shown that most of us tend to judge our own actions more favorably than we judge the actions of those with whom we are in conflict. In one study participants described their own behavior as collaborative or willing to compromise about 2/3s of the time, while they judged others to have similar behavior and motives only 10% of the time. Instead, they viewed the other party’s behavior as either avoidance or competition. Both parties in the conflict tend to view their own efforts as positive actions motivated by a desire to find workable solutions, while they each see the other as either trying to walk away from/avoid the conflict or as having an “I’m going to win, and you’re going to lose” approach.*
 - ★ Point out that we have been considering the effect of conflict on individuals. Mention that the effect is similar on groups of people. The dynamics of conflict drive wedges between groups of people that become increasingly harder to bridge.
- 2. Examination of a model of the conflict cycle (20 minutes)**
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Six Stages of the Conflict Cycle” (Participant Handouts, p. 7).
 - ★ State that social scientists regard conflict as progressing in a cyclical manner, with some stages of the cycle being very apparent and others being dormant or more difficult to perceive.

Recognizing the Dynamics and Stages of Conflict, continued

- ★ Ask different participants to read aloud, in order, each of the six stages and its description.
- ★ Ask if participants understand the differences between the stages. If necessary, clarify that the “perceived” stage is an intellectual awareness, i.e., “If I lived in the same community as Ruth, we’d have to come to some serious understandings.” By the “felt” stage this awareness is more than just intellectual, i.e., “My stomach tightens as soon as I hear Bill’s voice.”
- ★ Clarify that the “manifest” stage may not necessarily involve loud voices. It could appear as a noticeable sense of strain or tension when both parties are in the same room, parties pointedly sitting as far apart as possible or other non-verbal indicators, or non-attendance by one party at an event at which the other party will be present.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “The Conflict Choice Point and Its Consequences” (Participant Handouts, pp. 8-9).
- ★ Ask a participant to read aloud the comments at the top of the handout, above the graphic.
- ★ Ask a second participant to read the descriptions of the stages that branch from the choice of a consultative approach.
- ★ Ask a third participant to read the descriptions of the stages that branch from the choice of a competitive approach.
- ★ Invite comments on how individuals’ choices influence not only the resolution of the immediate situation but influence the future of the relationship as well.
- ★ *Optional: Share the thought that it is not uncommon to simply “find” ourselves midstream in this cycle without having consciously chosen to get in a conflict.*
- ★ *Emphasize that at that point - when we become aware of what is happening - wherever we are in the cycle, we always have the choice to resolve the conflict in a way that does not lead to what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described as “bitter loss” for anyone - the parties to the conflict, bystanders, or the unity of the larger group.*

Maturation, Conflict, and Development in the Bahá'í Community (35 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To recognize the developmental process of maturation
- ★ To feel confidence about the community's and the Assembly's ability to move forward in this process

Setting up the activities

- ★ Share the thought that our sense of confidence and patience, or disappointment and frustration, about a situation is shaped in part by our expectations.
- ★ Comment that in addition to the dynamics about conflict just reviewed, Bahá'í communities are also influenced by two other sets of dynamics:
 - the personal transformation process that each individual is undergoing
 - the maturation process of the community collectively and its institutions in these earliest years of the Bahá'í Dispensation
- ★ The combination of these dynamics ensures that internal tests will be an inevitable part of the developmental process of Bahá'í community life in this day.

Activities:

1. Small group study of the Writings (20 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 3-4.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout "Maturation, Conflict, and Development in the Bahá'í Community" (Participant Handouts, pp. 10-11).
- ★ Ask groups to:
 - read through the quotations
 - highlight elements that are important to an accurate understanding of the developmental process of building unified Bahá'í communities
 - compile a list of elements and dynamics that will contribute to a realistic set of expectations

2. Groups report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Invite each group to share its list of elements and dynamics.
- ★ Ask how the perspectives provided by these quotations changed the way participants felt about tests and conflicts in the Bahá'í community.

Correlating handout:

- ★ "Maturation, Conflict, and Development in the Bahá'í Community" pp. 10-11

Maturation, Conflict, and Development in the Bahá'í Community, continued

3. Facilitator comments (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants back to the third quote on their handout:

“Often these trials and tests which all Bahá'í communities inevitably pass through seem terrible, at the moment, but in retrospect we understand that they were due to the frailty of human nature, to misunderstandings, and to the growing pains which every Bahá'í community must experience.”
- ★ Share the thought that modifiers such as “inevitably” and “every Bahá'í community” can remove some of the burdensome feeling of “what’s wrong with us?” that communities and Assemblies may experience.
- ★ Suggest a relationship between this quotation and the quality of “patience and long-suffering in difficulties,” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá singles out as one of the requisites of consultation: Since “the frailty of human nature” will always be with us, and “growing pains” must simply be lived through, acquiring patience and the capacity for long-suffering during difficult situations is vital, both for individuals and for institutions.
- ★ Suggest that these passages may also give an Assembly the courage to attempt new courses of action or “rise to a new stage” in the exercise of its responsibilities, knowing it will make mistakes as part of the process of establishing and promoting new patterns of behavior. These mistakes, however, are preferable to the Assembly being paralyzed into inaction by a fear of not knowing exactly what to do and how to do it perfectly.

Optional break: A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.

The Role of the Assembly (90 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To examine various roles the Assembly can play in regard to conflict
- ★ To gain confidence in and familiarity with the role of counseling believers in conflict

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and markers

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “The Role of the Assembly” pp. 12-14
- ★ “Six Stages of the Conflict Cycle” p. 7
- ★ “Acting as a Third Party” p. 15
- ★ “Counseling Believers in Conflict” pp. 16-17

Activities:

1. Pairs review of Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to “The Role of the Assembly” (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-14).
- ★ Ask participants to select a partner. Pairs should read through the quotations and highlight roles of the Assembly in relation to conflict.

2. Pairs share their findings (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each pair to share one item they highlighted. Write each role on a flip chart master list. Continue through pairs until all items that are not duplicates have been mentioned.
- ★ Note that several of the quotations refer to conflict among members of the Assembly itself.
- ★ Offer the thought that this form of conflict makes very clear the distinction between the institution and the members who serve on it. The institution is responsible for managing conflict among its members as well as conflict in the community.
- ★ Underscore the importance of resolving conflict and maintaining unity within the Assembly by calling to mind ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warning “Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught.” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 88)
- ★ Suggest that resolving internal conflict is also an element of spiritual leadership. The institution must model the behaviors and attitudes to which it calls the friends.
- ★ Note that the quotation about Assembly members needing to “adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the conduct of their official responsibilities” implies that Assembly members have a role to play as individuals, even when the institution is not in session. By unofficially serving as peacemakers and role models, members can help individuals in the community successfully win their own spiritual battles with conflict.

The Role of the Assembly, continued

3. Group consideration of the latent stage of the conflict cycle (25 minutes)

- ★ Mention that a key point in the conflict cycle for individuals is the choice point that occurs after conflict has been felt and the emotions have been engaged but before the individual decides whether to go forward consultatively or competitively.
- ★ Suggest that Assemblies, in their oversight role of loving shepherds, protective of the health of their flock, will find it useful to focus on different stages of the conflict cycle than an individual would.
- ★ Refer back to the handout “Six Stages of the Conflict Cycle” (Participant Handouts, p. 7). Ask a participant to read the description of the latent stage aloud.
- ★ Comment that an Assembly paying attention to latent conditions might take several forms.
 - One form might be a focus on creating healthy conditions in the community. This is similar to the “public health” approach of creating a healthy populace able to ward off infections to which they might be exposed.
 - Another form might be increasing the Assembly’s capacity to perceive disunity – or the potential for disunity – at an early stage and invite participants to consult with the institution or take other appropriate action.
- ★ Ask the group for a few examples of latent conflict.
 - Introduce (or expand upon, if it was mentioned) the thought that a Bahá’í community is intentionally diverse and works hard to increase its diversity, as opposed to groups more homogenous by personality, race, culture, or interests.
 - Suggest that this intentional diversity, while enriching, also presents many possibilities for potential misunderstandings or conflicting views on a wide range of subjects. Assemblies must proactively monitor and address these possibilities before frustration or hurt feelings arise from them.

The Role of the Assembly, continued

- ★ Ask the group for examples of latent conflict that may result from growth and diversity in a community.
(Examples might include a large influx of believers from a different racial or culture background, several families with small children moving into an older community, a community growing to a size where meeting in homes is becoming less feasible.)
- ★ Make a list of these examples on a flip chart or board.
- ★ Go through the list and ask participants to suggest one or two ways in which an Assembly could proactively address each situation before it becomes a source of conflict.

4. Examination of third party intervention (5 minutes)

- ★ Comment that in the “manifest” and “resolution” stages of the conflict cycle the Assembly’s focus will primarily be on assisting believers already in conflict and possibly dealing with the situation of the community lining up in support of contending believers. During the “aftermath” stage its focus will primarily be restoring unity after a conflict or dealing with poorly resolved conflicts and grievances from the past that continue to fester.
- ★ Point out that in all of these later stages the Assembly is functioning as an objective third party, counseling and mediating between the parties to the conflict, whether these parties are internal or external to the institution.
- ★ Explain that the role of the Assembly is somewhat similar to other forms of third party intervention, such as counselors or mediators, with a few, crucial differences:
 - The Assembly may intervene when only one – or none – of the parties requests its help, if the Assembly feels the unity of the community is put at risk because of the conflict.
 - The Assembly has the moral authority and responsibility to call the individuals to fresh consideration of the requirements of the Faith relating to conflict resolution and personal transformation.
 - The Assembly is a channel of divine guidance.

The Role of the Assembly, continued

- ★ Emphasize that these are powerful tools in conflict resolution.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Acting as a Third Party” (Participant Handouts, p. 15). Ask four participants to each read aloud one of the four sets of functions.
- ★ Invite comments or additions to the list of functions.

5. Small group review of the Writings (25 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Counseling Believers in Conflict” (Participant Handouts, pp. 16-17). Divide participants into small groups and ask them to read through the quotations.
- ★ Ask groups to look for points or themes to be raised directly with believers, either in personal consultation with the Assembly or in letters sent to them.

6. Groups report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Invite groups to share points or themes they identified as being important to raise with believers in conflict.
- ★ Examples might include the following:
 - encouraging all parties to drop their grievances
 - helping them see the larger picture and place things in the context of the needs of humanity and the Faith vs. personal feelings
 - helping them see conflict as an opportunity for growth and personal development
- ★ Share the following thoughts:
 - In many conflict situations believers can and should be encouraged to transcend their grievances, put their difficulties behind them, and move forward, without dwelling further on the issue.
 - The Assembly’s role as an upholder of justice and protector of individuals and the community may require that conflicts involving an underlying injustice or pattern of harm be resolved to the extent possible, not just personally transcended.
 - Admonitions to individuals to consider the larger context or gain spiritual perspective do not mean one must submit to injustice or overlook abuse.

The Role of the Assembly, continued

- A spiritual resolution of conflict implies that the problem is addressed in a spiritual way. This may include individual forgiveness and transformation. It may also include frank discussion of the issues, outside counseling, legal action, or Assembly sanctions.
- Conflict resolution is hard work. Feeling a deep sense of the Assembly's love and support during the process can help heal hearts and open minds to solutions.

7. Resources available to Assemblies (1 minute)

- ★ Mention that Bahá'í schools and training institutes sometimes offer training programs in conflict resolution or mediation. These may be useful to an Assembly as it develops its skills in this area.
- ★ Remind participants that Auxiliary Board members are always available to assist Assemblies. Consultation with a Board member may shed light on a particular situation or suggest new approaches for an Assembly to consider.

8. Summary comment by facilitator (1 minute)

- ★ Close this segment with the reassurance that each conflict episode successfully resolved in a healthy way creates more positive latent conditions and also gives both participants and the Assembly greater confidence in their ability to resolve conflicts that may occur in future.

Dealing with Disruptive Individuals (25 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To reflect on the responsibility of the Assembly
- ★ To consider options open to the Assembly

Setting up the activity

- ★ Problems sometimes arise that severely hamper the ability of the community – or the Assembly itself – to consult and work together cooperatively. These may include mental disorders, contentiousness, or a domineering attitude. Assemblies have been empowered to lovingly but firmly set limits and boundaries for disruptive individuals.

Activities:

1. Individual review of the Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Dealing with Disruptive Individuals” (Participant Handouts, pp. 18-19).
- ★ Ask participants to read silently through the quotations and underline key elements of the guidance, particularly responsibilities of Assemblies and options open to Assemblies.

2. Group reflection (20 minutes)

- ★ Invite volunteers to share what they underlined. Make a list on a flip chart of the Assembly’s responsibilities and options.
- ★ Ask if examination of these quotations has given a wider sense of ways in which the situation of a disruptive believer in the community can be handled.
- ★ If the topic has not yet arisen, mention that sometimes an individual may couch his dissatisfaction with the Assembly or one of its decisions in terms of being “in conflict” with the institution rather than being disobedient to the institution. He may even cite the passage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about “If two souls quarrel and contend about a question of the divine questions, differing and disputing, both are wrong,” implying that the Assembly is wrong, too. Point out that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referring to the dynamics between two individuals, not an individual and an institution. Individuals may respectfully request that an Assembly reconsider a decision, but they must continue to obey the decision.
- ★ *Optional: If it seems relevant, refer back to the quotation on the handout about a believer who “insists on expounding his*

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and marker

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Dealing with Disruptive Individuals” pp. 18-19

Dealing with Disruptive Individuals, continued

view at Bahá'í meetings, and frequently disrupts such gatherings.”

- ★ *Point out that the views referred to in this quotation are not necessarily criticisms or undermining the authority of the Assembly. They are, however, disruptive of the purpose of the gathering; and stubborn persistence in this behavior indicates ego-driven motives and a lack of concern for the needs and interests of the Faith or the other believers present.*
- ★ Invite comments on what additional dynamics come into play if the disruptive believer is also a member of the Assembly.

Optional break: *A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.*

Case Studies for Consultation

(variable amount of time; minimum of 45 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To provide practice in applying conflict management principles to the specifics of various situations

Note to facilitator:

- ★ These case studies may be used in several possible ways, depending on time available:
 - ask all groups to choose a single case by topic (disunity in the community driving a believer to withdraw, a business dispute, a disruptive individual, or bitterness after a divorce) and compare the suggestions of different groups
 - have groups each work on a different case simultaneously
 - have each group work on each case sequentially

Activities:

1. Review of the consultative process (5 minutes)

- ★ Share the following comments:
 - The process of identifying and applying principles to the problems and responsibilities of the Local Assembly requires careful research and reasoning.
 - Any decision made by an Assembly should be grounded in the guidance of the Writings and the senior institutions.
 - The decision should also be the result of a systematic approach.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles: Reviewing the Process” (Participant Handouts p. 20)
- ★ Comment that several workshops in the Assembly development series examine the consultative process in great depth. Clarify that the points on this handout are only intended to summarize some elements of the consultative process.
- ★ Ask volunteers to read aloud the five highlighted steps.

2. Small group consultation (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 4-5.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Case Studies for Consultation” (Participant Handouts, pp. 21-22). Assign each group a case.

Case Studies for Consultation, continued

- ★ Ask each group to:
 - read their case study
 - suggest what the Assembly could do
 - make reference to the spiritual or administrative principles that led to these suggestions
- ★ Acknowledge that groups may want more detailed facts about their case, but stress that their task is to practice the skills of thinking through general principles and applying them to a particular situation.
- ★ Clarify to groups that if their guidance would be influenced by various factors, they are free to suggest multiple approaches, depending on different “missing” facts they feel may be pertinent.

3. Groups report back (5 minutes per group)

- ★ Ask each group to explain its case and share its suggestions, noting the principles that led to the suggestions.

Optional extension:

- ★ *After each group explains its case and shares its suggestions, ask the whole group for any other ideas that might also be helpful in that particular case.*

Optional extension: Further practice with case studies (variable amount of time)

- ★ *Continue to go through all the case studies.*

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles: Reviewing the Process” p. 20
- ★ “Case Studies for Consultation” pp. 21-22

Optional extension: Role play (variable amount of time)

- ★ *Invite members of groups, one group at a time, to role play Assembly members appealing to the believers involved in their case study to arise to a higher level of unity and resolve their differences for the sake of the Cause.*

Closing (10 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To review what has been learned
- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all efforts to resolve conflict

1. Summary review (1 minute)

- ★ Give a quick summary of what has been learned:
 - We have looked at the dynamics of conflict, recognizing its progressive and escalating nature.
 - We have examined stages of the conflict cycle and discovered both where individuals can make choices and where the Assembly can impact situations.
 - We have reflected on the developmental process of maturation in the community.
 - We have considered the roles, responsibilities, and options open to the Assembly.
 - We have practiced applying conflict management principles to specific cases.

2. Reference to supplemental readings (4 minutes)

- ★ Point out that the handouts also contain a selection of supplemental readings at the end (Participant Handouts, pp. 24-33). These have not been used in the workshop due to time constraints but were chosen because they provide valuable insights and guidance on conflicts related to business matters.
- ★ Offer the following descriptions of the articles:
 - The first selection, excerpted from a book by Hand of the Cause of God Rúhíyyih Khánúm, is a very straightforward reflection on spirituality and practicality.
 - Lawrence Miller's article "Doing Business Together: Guidelines for a Harmonious Business Relationship" will be useful both to Assemblies and to individuals in the community. Mr. Miller, who operated a management consulting business for many years, has written a practical and easy to read article that offers guidelines based on spiritual principles and sound business practices. It covers three areas: hiring Bahá'ís, investing in a fellow Bahá'í's business venture, and starting a business with fellow Bahá'ís. The article discusses questions that should be resolved in advance to the agreement of all parties and then put in writing in order to avoid possible future misunderstandings. Encouraging believers who are

Correlating handout:

- ★ "Assurances of Divine Confirmations" p. 23

Closing, continued

interested in doing business together to read and consult on these points is a proactive step that could prevent future conflict over business related issues.

- ★ Encourage participants to read through these materials as a take-home assignment.

3. Closing quotations (5 minutes)

- ★ Choose participants to read aloud one each of the closing quotations “Assurances of Divine Confirmations” (Participant Handouts, p. 23)
- ★ *Optional: Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of a passage on behalf of the Universal House of Justice as a gift (an example suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper follows)*

Inspired by the spirit
of Bahá'u'lláh's
Teachings, we are
called on to make the
Bahá'í community a
haven of harmony and
love, in contrast to the
distress, contention
and strife of the
surrounding society.

on behalf of the Universal House of Justice