

A Proposed CRD Department Philosophy of Engagement and Controversy

As CRD educators, the principles that guide our work are based on our belief in the value of democracy and informed citizen involvement. In fact, CRD educational activities and programs are rooted in the engagement of citizens, organizations, local officials, and whole communities, in order to identify needs, address issues, and create change. We engage a pluralistic, often divided society, and thus face controversy as a natural component of our public work. This is true whether the public policy trade-off we may encounter is planning & zoning v. property rights, economic growth v. resource preservation, or governmental cost-effectiveness v. local home rule. Here is a set of principles to which we adhere as we engage in public issues education.

- *CRD educators practice intellectual honesty in addressing issues by exploring diverse points of view.*

CRD educators will often face issues in which they have a personal interest. We need to be willing to examine our own biases if we wish to be effective in bringing all points of view to bear on a particular problem. We also need to be fair and honest with our clients regarding any strongly held positions we might have.

- *CRD educators consider science or research from academic sources along with the community's indigenous knowledge and values.*

Wisdom is not limited to the University. While we have a particular advantage in bringing academic research results to a problem, we also need to recognize the importance of the community's knowledge about a problem and the community's various belief systems. One of our roles as educators is to help people recognize and examine their understanding and beliefs about an issue.

- *CRD educators strive for objectivity when addressing controversial issues, even if their values lead them to have personal views on these issues.*

Objective is not 'neutral'. Objective means 'based on observable phenomena'. We can objectively assist communities in assessing the facts that may affect their decision-making. At the same time, we may legitimately own personal views on issues. Good judgment is needed in deciding if, when and how to express our values.

- *CRD educators identify processes that assist communities in productively engaging citizens.*

If we believe strongly in democracy and the importance of informed citizen involvement, then we work with communities to use processes that maximize positive and constructive involvement of all, particularly those most affected by a public issue.

- *CRD educators help communities explore and understand a range of choices available and the potential consequences of those choices.*

While we may not advocate particular solutions to public issues, we can help communities recognize a broader range of choices and their potential consequences. This approach is frequently referred to as the alternatives-consequences model of public policy education. [See Richard Barrows, Public Policy Education, North Central Regional Extension Publications, 1993.]

- *CRD educators utilize research and science, both qualitative and quantitative, in their programming.*

This also includes bringing our research capacity to bear when particular issues do not have a great deal of either local wisdom or science to help us understand more completely the range of choices and their consequences.

- *CRD educators acquire and sharpen their skills in public policy education, conflict management, citizen participation, change processes, and relevant subject matter.*

We can and do engage in controversial issues. We owe it to ourselves and to our clients to make sure that we have the process skills and content knowledge needed to effectively provide education and facilitation on important community topics. CRD educators should continually assess their competencies, acknowledge their limitations when appropriate, and solicit counsel and assistance from more qualified people when needed.

- *CRD Educators depend on University support including adequate training, needs assessment, and public endorsement, as educators address controversial issues based on sound program planning.*

For community-based educators to feel confident in programming on controversial issues, we need to know that the University not only provides needed resources and training, but also acknowledges its support of our engagement in controversial issues. Controversial issues should not be avoided per se, but they should be approached in a well thought-out and coordinated manner.