



## The Sustainable Knowledge Model

The concept of sustainable knowledge is the core of the sustainable development model of community building—at its base is the belief that what sustains community is the sharing and passing down of knowledge. A community cannot survive if this knowledge is not transmitted to its members. Applied to parties in mediation or facilitation with community groups, the premise is that parties have the wisdom to make decisions when these decisions are based on shared information.

In Norm-Educating mediation the parties gather all relevant information, utilize resources and advisors, and share ideas throughout the process. The Norm-Educating Model supports the concept of sustainable knowledge in presenting information and furthering negotiation skills during the mediation process. The goal is to sustain communication and sharing of information outside the mediation. Tools for interaction, collaboration, and negotiation are offered.

Mediators and facilitators can assist groups in structured dialogue about social and political issues, but must distinguish between dialogue that promotes participation, and an empty exercise used for appeasement. Mediation, group facilitation, and other forms of Alternative Dispute Resolution, should not be used as vehicles to divert accountability away from government or business institutions. The decision whether or not to engage in dialogue is based on an assessment that all participants have the *good will* to respect others and to share relevant information. Information that *is* private, can and should be protected, however, use of non-disclosure and confidentiality agreements require decisions that need to be carefully considered based on an understanding of the legal consequences.

Making information available to everyone promotes an informed citizenry. The right to public information and a wide distribution of that information encourages participation in planning and decision making. A community based on the Sustainable Knowledge Model promotes participatory democracy. Democracy is a method for collective decision-making in which participants are on equal footing. Access to information gives all members of the community the power to shape the environment in which they live—as citizens--not merely consumers. Development of projects with those who benefit from, and are impacted by them, is the strategy of the Sustainable Knowledge Model.

Creating public space where a range of views can be heard and in which the goal is not winning but finding solutions, was intrinsic in the founding of the US democratic system. Though these processes were never institutionalized and many groups were originally excluded, new possibilities are emerging that are demonstrating that the principles of democracy work. Deliberative democracy models such as citizen juries are being utilized to address policy issues in various parts of the world.

**“In a society of equals, individuals must work in combination to do anything.”**

James Fishkin, *The Rise of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy*