



# **IDEAS FOR WORKING WITH OPPONENTS: TURNING OPPOSITION INTO COLLABORATION**

## **1. Be prepared**

It's easy to get so excited about your trail project that you can't imagine anyone arguing against your idea. Then when you encounter the inevitable opposition, it can feel like an attack. You can avoid this by thinking through who may take issue with the project and why. Then you can prepare information for a productive conversation with them.

## **2. Keep an open mind**

View opponents with an open mindset. If you see them as "the enemy," these conversations will feel combative and difficult to resolve. Instead, approach the problem as an opportunity to listen, educate and attempt to find common ground.

Through productive conversations some may take on a neutral stance or even become supporters once they understand more about the project and its community benefits.

## **3. Be prepared to make changes**

Listening to their concerns can reveal ways to improve your project. Be open-minded to realize when an important point is brought up and work together to identify solutions.

## **4. Know your audience**

Understanding their motivations and concerns is a key step to success in working with these stakeholders.



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## 4. Know Your Audience (cont.)

### Who are they?

**Neighbors:** They may fear that their quiet park will become a hectic space with traffic, parking problems and noise. Also, homeowners often think that crimes such as burglary will increase as more people from outside the neighborhood are near their homes. You can:

- Be considerate of neighboring homes and structures during trail planning and design. Allow for vegetated buffers or use landforms as a way to separate trail use from property lines. Let them know that trail use isn't inherently noisy. They may hear voices briefly as people ride/hike past, or temporary noise from trailheads, but most trail users are seeking a quiet experience themselves.
- If your project is a bike park where people will congregate and stay, use design to your advantage. Locate the parking lot and kid-focused amenities at a distance from areas of concern. But at the same time consider neighborhood connectivity.
- Encourage them to use the trails themselves by educating landowners on the benefits of trails.
- Remind them that trails [do not cause an increase in crime](#), and in fact they [increase property values](#).







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## 4. Know Your Audience (cont.)

### Who are they?

#### Objectors to trails in natural, undeveloped areas

- Understanding the resources and potential impacts is a key component of any trail project. Being a willing collaborator around these questions will make your project much more successful in the long term. Educate yourself with [these resources](#).
- Resource issues require research and relationship building. Reach out to the land manager's resource specialist to gain an understanding of the flora, fauna, and cultural artifacts that exist on the project property and the potential impacts. If you are told that your chosen location is firmly non-viable for development from the land manager's point of view — maybe it's critical habitat for a certain species, for example — start brainstorming ideas for another location rather than try to fight that decision.
- If the location is viable but needs adjustment (certain animals use the area for migration; key birds nest in the area; specific trees can't be removed), work with the land manager on how to address those issues before moving on. Many successful trail systems use creative solutions like temporary trail closures for nesting or migration, or designing around important habitat, etc.
- Look for similar projects that navigated the issues you're facing. Even if those occurred with a different land management agency, it will give your land manager new ideas for how it can be implemented.
- Identify “non-trail” projects that can assist with habitat concerns like noxious weed removal and tree planting. These efforts can help gain support from concerned stakeholders.
- Consider offering a Trail Assessment workshop to look at the ecological, social, financial impacts of modern planned, designed, and constructed resilient/sustainable trails.



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## 4. Know Your Audience (cont.)

### Who are they?

**Those who have projects in direct competition for the same community dollars or access**

- If you feel your project is being overlooked in favor of other projects with fewer benefits to the community, check your communication strategy: Are you communicating a clear vision of your idea and how it positively impacts a wide range of residents? If not, work to refine and improve your “elevator pitch” using information about the benefits of access to recreation opportunities, youth engagement, health, economic impact, etc.
- Do you have broad community support? If many citizens are asking for a particular amenity, it’s harder for officials to ignore the repeated message. Make your message the most prominent and appealing of the options. Develop a concise document that describes the project and the benefits to the community(ies). Use this to market the project and enable advocates to have consistent speaking points.
- You can build more support by getting more people involved. Widen your communications net, ask supporters to write letters to officials and/or to local newspapers, recruit more people to speak at public meetings, ask local businesses/organizations to chime in, etc.
- If you still find yourself being pushed out of contention, don’t give up. You may need to turn to outside fundraising, which remains a viable way to get your project done. Similarly, loss of access to a piece of land doesn’t have to be the end if another potential property exists.







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## 4. Know Your Audience (cont.)

### Who are they?

**Entities seeking other uses of the land, such as those in real estate development, farming/ranching and extraction.**

Don't automatically assume these situations are a dead end; there can still be creative solutions in some cases. Seek out similar successful trail related projects that were/are a collaboration with developers, farmers/ranchers, and/or extraction companies. Begin by contacting the community members involved in those projects to get advice and ideas, so that you can come to the table with strategies in mind.



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