



Sirius Community near Amherst

**Diana's Workshop  
in Western Massachusetts**

**Antidotes to Five Common Kinds  
of Community Conflict**

**Sunday, January 25**

**9:00 am – 5:30 pm  
Sirius Community,**

72 Baker Road  
Shutesbury (near Amherst), Massachusetts

With lively exercises, humorous musical skits, and vivid anecdotes about real problems and their solutions in healthy, thriving intentional communities (and cautionary tales from those that failed), Diana focuses on ways to build trust and connection and reduce conflict in existing communities as well as in forming groups.

***(1) Reducing and eliminating "Structural Conflict."***

Identifying and briefly discussing six crucial organizational structures that, when missing, can cause failure in forming-community groups or wrenching conflict in existing communities.

These structures include • Common Mission & Purpose • Clear Agreements in Writing • Fair, Participatory Decision-Making Method (and if it's consensus, getting trained in it before using it) • Valuing & Using Both Head & Heart Skills • Good Communication & Group Process Skills (including accountability

methods, and having a conflict-resolution method in place from the beginning) • Well-Organized New-Member Policy (including selecting cofounders and new members who will be a good match for the group and its goals).

Some structures are explored in more depth, including Mission & Purpose (including the musical skit, "*That's Not Community!*"), and "Decision-Making, Power, and Governance," about how the most number of people can get most of what they want, most of the time.

Diana considers the single most helpful part of this workshop to be the "Board Game"—learning about the crucial, mutually influencing relationship between a group's mission & purpose, its decision-making method, and its new-member policy.

This section also notes the many kinds of community practices—agenda planning, well-crafted proposals, meeting evaluations, decision logs, labor requirements, labor credit policies, and many more—which can make all the difference in helping communities keep morale high and reduce stress.

**(2) *Creating Communication Agreements.*** Creating such agreements increases energy and satisfaction in meetings and helps reduce the level of distrust and hurt feelings that can result from people having differing communication styles during meetings. Experiential small-group exercise.

**(3) *Helping People Stay Accountable to the Group.*** Three effective, no-shame/no-blame ways to help each other stay accountable to group agreements, and how to use a "graduated series of consequences" process when people consistently break agreements. These processes help raise the level of trust in the group and reduce the amount of resentment and demoralization that can occur when people don't abide by their agreements. Includes role-playing exercise.

**(4) *Building a Sense of Trust and Connection.*** These first three methods help reduce the kinds conflicts that can devastate a group and quickly erode trust between members. A group can also do processes that specifically build trust and connection—so when conflict does arise it's much easier to deal with than if trust levels were lower. Experiential whole-group

exercise.

**(5) Dealing Effectively with "The Challenging Person."** Sometimes a group has a member who is so challenging that some people want to leave the group (or do leave!). This is a highly effective, relatively widespread (but usually not consciously applied) method to gently—and with no shame or blame—encourage the person to change their ways . . . or to, on their own, decide to leave.

**(6) Cultivating Your Social Capital in the Group.** If you have high "social capital" personally, you will most likely be listened to and your ideas for the community considered seriously. If you have low social capital, no matter how articulate your proposals or relevant your ideas, your ideas may be dismissed or ignored. Fortunately, there are things we can do to increase our own social capital and hence personal effectiveness in a group . . . and help the whole community thrive. Role-playing exercise.

Other topics touched on in the first day include the Rock Polisher Effect, the Lightning Rod Effect, and the Future Community Success Assessment Tool.

How we can use the Empowered Member/Disempowered Member model and Robert Gilman's insights on "multiple centers of initiative" to understand and benefit our community and ourselves.

*Includes handout booklet.*

**Workshop Fee:**

\$100 per person.

**For More Information, and to Register:**

Brice Wilson, Sirius Community. 413-259-1251.  
brice~at~siriuscommunity.org.

**What People Say about the Workshop:**

"Your workshop was fantastic — **chock full of concrete steps to**

**address specific problems, with an enlightening perspective on underlying causes."**

—Donna Freiermuth, Westside Cohousing, Santa Monica, CA

□ "Lively, interactive, and quite inspiring, **your workshop wrestled with all the potentially taboo subjects but in a humorous way**, including dealing with accountability in community. Very valuable indeed!"

—Sarah Berger, Lawton Lodge Cohousing, Sussex, England

"Absolutely fulfilled the workshop description and more. **Practical, specific, clear instruction delivered in a most entertaining fashion** — time flew by!"

—Susan Smith, Vancouver, B.C.

"What a great presentation — **humorous, active, energizing**. Highly recommended for any cohousing group. **I especially liked the role-playing and guerilla theater.**"

—Jerry Rolls, Roberts Creek Cohousing, B.C.

"**I especially enjoyed the 'off-off-Broadway play'** and how you 'played' each point with drawings on the whiteboard, complete with ad-libs. **Like a perfectly written story or play, nothing in the workshop was superfluous—it was a 10!**"

—Alegria Imperial, Vancouver, B.C.

"**You have a real sense of the issues that arise in community** and a way of communicating solutions and possibilities that is **concise, lively, and engaging**"

—Vesanto Melina, Windsong Cohousing, Langley, B.C.