



Water Forum Virtual Happy Hour May 5, 2021

The Water Forum hosted a meet-and-greet with new Water Forum Public Caucus members and a conversation with special guest, Susan Sherry, the founder and former Executive Director of the Center for Collaborative Policy and facilitator for the original Water Forum agreement.



SPECIAL GUEST SUSAN SHERRY'S COMMENTS

The following three questions guided Susan's comments at the event:

- What were the key ingredients to the success of the WF I Agreement?
- What were some of the big challenges we faced and how did we overcome them?
- What advice would I give the WF members for WF 2.0 effort?

INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS

1. Deep understanding of and commitment to interest-based problem-solving. Interest-based problem-solving if not fluff or foo-foo. You absolutely will not come to an agreement unless you seriously embrace interest-based thinking. Examples of WF I Interest based thinking:
 - a. Folks internalized the needs/interests of those with whom they disagreed and actively tried to find solutions that met the needs of their adversaries. WF I stakeholders did not necessarily agree with others' interests, but they honored and respected them. Example: During one crucial negotiation, the environmental representatives were held up and had not arrived, but we needed to proceed. So, Jim Ray of the Business Caucus said that he would represent the environmental interests until they arrived. Jim did this brilliantly.
 - b. Keep asking WHY of those you disagree with. for a deeper understanding of their interest
2. Giving sufficient time to education before negotiation on a particular issue without pushing for or angling for a solution while learning.



3. Exceptional policy, technical and mediation staffing. Enormously important.
4. Adequate financial support. Seven years of WF I cost 10 M, including the money to do rigorous technical studies when needed.
5. Support of the stakeholders' elected officials and boards of directors, especially those footing the bill. We encouraged their participation along the way at key points by bringing forward issues for them to discuss and then provide "Authorization to Proceed." We did not ask for consent or agreement at those points. Agreement was reserved for the very end because the Agreement needs to be seen as a complete and full package of agreements – with gives and takes. We also met privately with many individual board members and elected officials, when appropriate.
6. Relying on multiple iterations of trial balloons, which were always put to writing. Trial balloons are starting points not necessarily the solution.
7. Getting to know each other as people – beyond knowing each other as stakeholders
8. If a technical study is particularly crucial to the problem-solving, agree beforehand on the assumptions of the study.
9. We made having FUN a priority.
10. Having stakeholder who act as facilitative bridges among stakeholders, particularly when the going gets tough.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME – THERE WERE MANY BUT HERE ARE TWO OF THEM.

1. **Preparing for a Drought** – Similar to current challenge. How in the heck to have water for people and fish in very dry conditions? Caused enormous consternation and tension.

Conference Year: Rather than say what purveyors and the river got in a dry year, the willingness of all to commit to a PROCESS with the understanding that the pain has to be shared and all had to stay together no matter what.

2. **Glitch in the Modelling Under Pinning the Agreement and the Final EIR**

We were at the end of the negotiations, exhausted, and doing an EIR on the Agreement, which was legally necessary. Everyone wanted the end to the negotiations, especially the funders.



Modelling for EIR found that the WF Agreement would potentially cause impacts to water purveyors OUTSIDE the WF region. This would have been a deal breaker and possible end to the 7 years of work, so the stakes were very high. What did we do? With much forbearance and patience, we commissioned the modelers to review all assumptions and rerun the model, looking for what caused the impacts to those outside the region. We didn't know how this would end. Because of the thousands of inputs and algorithms in the simulation, this postponed the agreement for 6 months and required more money for the technical consultants. Modelers found a error in the base model from the Bureau. That outcome wasn't assured, but folks hung in there.

ADVICE

1. Just Keep talking with each other – even when it is bleak, even when you are covering old territory, and even when all seems hopeless.
2. Brainstorm solutions without judgement. Throw out wild ideas – something might trigger an idea for someone else in the room. You don't need to support a brainstorm idea to throw it out.
3. Offer up lots of trial balloons – offering doesn't mean support or assent. Trial Balloons are a structure for discussion. Stakeholder should not hold each other to trial balloons that they offer or speak favorably about, until there is a formal agreement.
4. Go back and review what made the WF I Agreement work. Each of those 10 points contains important advice.

