



## Controversial Issue Process

The *NCBI Controversial Issue Process* trains leaders to deal constructively with tough conflicts, enabling them to move disputing parties toward future cooperation. The *NCBI Controversial Issue Process* provides a structured methodology that allows people on both sides of an entrenched issue to express their concerns, to listen attentively to the other side, and then to reframe the issue in a way that respectfully takes into account the concerns of both sides. The *NCBI Controversial Issue Process* gives leaders a way to take on some of the most heated contemporary controversies, including abortion rights, capital punishment, affirmative action, same-sex marriage, environmental policy, and assisted suicide. Discussing these issues is often difficult for even the most seasoned leaders, because the questions they raise challenge core cultural and religious beliefs.

NCBI can also work with organizations and community groups that are in the midst of a particularly difficult controversy. We can either train an internal resource team to lead the NCBI Controversial Issue Process, or we can send a team of experienced NCBI staff members to lead the process.

*NCBI Controversial Issue Process* teaches a set of skills that are essential for effective conflict resolution: listening to and repeating back each side's concerns, formulating questions that elicit more information, recognizing the "emotional ring" in the issues presented, welcoming personal stories that explain the underlying significance of each side's position, mapping out points of agreement as well as disagreement, and then reframing the issue in a way that allows the disputing parties to find common ground.

The skills that the *NCBI Controversial Issue Process* teaches are applicable to every conflict situation, whether the controversy involves a labor-management dispute, a clash between different neighborhood groups, or a quarrel among family members.

NCBI has successfully used the *NCBI Controversial Issue Process* in the following settings:

- With members of the United States Congress when a controversial bill was pending before the Senate to prohibit race as a consideration in trans-racial adoption;
- With leaders of the Episcopal Church when they were considering whether to ordain openly gay and lesbian clergy;
- With Black and Jewish students at a major state university when conflict arose following the campus appearance of a controversial speaker;
- With the general public at a community-wide forum in San Diego, California, when a pending state ballot initiative would ban affirmative action; and
- With firefighters from a town in Virginia when they had to decide whether to support or oppose a separate Black firefighter's union.