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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# Conflict Resolution Guide

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# ABOUT IMT

The Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) is a national nonprofit organization focused on increasing energy efficiency in buildings to save money, drive economic growth and job creation, reduce harmful pollution, and tackle climate change. IMT ignites greater investment in energy-efficient buildings through hands-on expert guidance, technical and market research, policy and program development and deployment, and promotion of best practices and knowledge exchange. For more information, visit [imt.org](https://imt.org).

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## CONTENTS

<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Principles for Transformative Justice .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>How IMT Addresses Conflict .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Between CBOs, Government Staff, and Contractors .....	7
Between IMT and CBOs .....	7
Between CBOs and Community Members .....	8
Between CBOs and Technical Partners .....	8
Between CBOs and Building Industry Members .....	10
Between CBOs and All Other IMT Stakeholders .....	10
<b>Ending the Working Relationship .....</b>	<b>11</b>

# OVERVIEW

Conflict is an inevitable part of every relationship. We experience it with our partners, children, friends, colleagues, even strangers. Conflict can be harmful when we are unwilling or unequipped to address it, but it can also be a powerful tool for reaching deeper levels of understanding and bringing about restorative justice<sup>1</sup> when we are prepared to face it.

The Institute for Market Transformation's Community Engagement (CE) team worked with a group of community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop the [Community Engagement Framework](#). Throughout the feedback process, many of them asked how our team handles conflict. We developed the following Conflict Resolution Transformative Justice Guide in an effort to promote transparency and accountability, and guide us when conflict arises between IMT, community partners,<sup>2</sup> and other external partners.<sup>3</sup>

To create this guide, we pulled information from the [Racial Equity Tools database](#), the [Restorative Just Culture Checklist](#) by Sidney Dekker, and [Turning Towards Each Other, A Conflict Workbook](#) by Jovida Ross and Weyam Ghadbian, and [\(divorcing\) White Supremacy Culture](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Restorative justice refers to "an approach to justice that seeks to repair harm by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm to communicate about and address their needs in the aftermath of the offense." (Source: [Principles and Guidelines for Restorative Justice Practice in Criminal Matters](#))

<sup>2</sup> By community partners, we mean community-based organizations (CBOs), residents (people residing in buildings), and community members.

<sup>3</sup> By other external partners, we mean governments (their staff and contractors), technical partners (organizations like IMT with expertise in the decarbonization of the built environment), and the business sector/building industry (real estate developers, high-performance building hub representatives, utility representatives, architects, business leaders, etc.).

# PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

For nearly its entire history, the United States has used policy to systematically and structurally exclude people of color and low-income people from its main pathways to economic and social advancement. This marginalization has created a reality where frontline community members hold less power in policy-making spaces than all other stakeholders we engage. One of IMT's goals is to balance uneven power dynamics in our policy work, high-performance building hubs, business engagement, and utility engagement. When conflict arises, IMT will be guided by fairness and justice towards all parties, however, we will prioritize the needs of frontline community members and CBOs first, and then support the other stakeholders we engage.

**1 Awareness of Power and Privilege.** As a technical institution with strong relationships to traditional power holders (governments, grassroots leaders, the real estate industry, and other leading technical organizations), we have the ear of those who have substantial influence and the legislative authority to decide how collective resources are allocated. We recognize and accept our power and privilege, and aim to disperse it with lower income residents, frontline community members, and CBOs.

**2 Empathy is Key.** Before one can repair the harm done, one must understand different perspectives and backgrounds. We collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders who are coming into this work with different personal and professional experiences. IMT strives to ensure that all parties know each other's motivations and larger roles in the ecosystem of our work together. This interpersonal care is crucial as we work toward systemic change.

**3 Zero-Tolerance for Violence or Threat of Violence.** IMT does not condone physical violence, threats of violence, microaggressions, or intimidation. Collaboration with those perpetuating violence or any threat of violence will cease immediately. The number one priority will be to ensure the safety and well-being of the injured party and the way this looks ultimately will be determined by them. In the instance of violence or threat of violence, IMT will take the following steps:

1. Remove the injured party from the presence of the perpetrator.
2. Reschedule or cancel virtual and/or in-person meetings until an agreement can be reached to ensure unnecessary contact between parties is avoided.
3. Ensure the injured party is safe (e.g. call an ambulance, escort them to a hospital or medical center, contact law enforcement, provide paid time off, etc.).
4. Inform IMT's Managing Director of Programs, Managing Director of Operations, Managing Director of Advancement, and the Executive Director of the incident.

4

**Collaboration, Consensus, and Communication.** IMT will present this guide to CBOs, residents that engage with CBOs, and the stakeholders we regularly engage. Feedback will be gathered from all parties and incorporated into the guide at the discretion of IMT's CE team, CBO partners, and residents. All parties must agree to these guidelines in order to be in partnership with IMT.

5

**Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice Mediation.** We will strive to have clear and healthy communication at all times, and abide by established norms co-developed by involved parties that will assist us in handling conflict amongst ourselves. However, we acknowledge that sometimes this isn't possible, and all of the partners we work with have the right to request an official Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice process at any time. This is an official request that will initiate the involvement of a neutral, external mediation professional(s) to assist in the process of repairing the harm and restoring the working relationship.





# ADDRESSING CONFLICT

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN CBOS, GOVERNMENT STAFF, AND CONTRACTORS?

- IMT respects CBOs' ability to speak for themselves and address conflict as they see fit.
- If IMT staff members witness government staff and contractors overstepping CBO boundaries, or mishandling their power, they will name it in the moment. IMT staff will participate in bystander intervention training to be better equipped to address these situations.
- The IMT CE team will meet with the CBO to determine how the CBO wants to move forward.
- The IMT CE team will use its institutional power to intervene on behalf of CBOs when explicitly asked to do so by the CBO.
- The IMT CE team will offer itself as a mediator to a conflict resolution process. If requested by the CBO or government staff, an outside mediator may be brought in.
- However, if too much harm has been caused, a complete recovery of a relationship isn't always possible or necessarily desirable. Consistent harm can turn into abuse, and total loss of trust. The harmed party always has the right to exit the collaboration without repercussions (see [MOU Section 7](#)).
- If the CBO wants to continue collaborating with the government staff and contractors, we will use the [Restorative Just Culture Checklist](#) by Sidney Dekker as a guide toward reconciliation (or another one of their choosing). This tool aims to repair trust and relationships damaged after an incident. It allows all parties to discuss how they have been affected, and collaboratively decide what should be done to repair the harm.
- Government staff, CBOs, and IMT can request outside mediation and this request supersedes any requests to work through conflict internally.

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN IMT AND CBOS?

- If at any time during the collaboration, the CBO or IMT's CE team members feel conflict has not been properly addressed, they can request for a formal Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice process to be initiated.
- The party that requests the initiation of the Conflict Resolution process can decide if they want to request an outside mediator to help resolve the conflict, or resolve it internally via the use of a [conflict resolution framework of their choosing](#).

- The right to request outside mediation supersedes the desire to work through conflict internally. For example, if a CBO initiates the formal Conflict Resolution process and decides to work through it internally, IMT can request outside mediation (and vice versa).

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN CBOS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

- The IMT CE team will attend virtually, and/or in person if possible, at least one community meeting and introduce themselves to the residents. They will also provide community members with their biographies, and contact information via email. The CE team will explain what IMT's role is in the relationship and leave the door open for residents to contact us directly.
- The IMT CE team will distribute a very short survey to residents after an outreach event with questions to determine if there is conflict between the resident(s) and the CBO that needs to be addressed. The IMT CE team will also conduct a mid-point "check-in" survey with residents.
- If a conflict is elevated by the residents or CBO, we will utilize the [Turning Towards Each Other, A Conflict Workbook](#) by Jovida Ross and Weyam Ghadbian (or a different one recommended by the CBO or residents) and the [Restorative Just Culture Checklist](#) by Sidney Dekker to collaboratively repair the harm.
- Residents, CBOs, and IMT can also request outside mediation and this request supersedes any requests to work through conflict internally.

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN CBOS AND TECHNICAL PARTNERS?

- IMT respects CBOs' ability to speak for themselves and address the conflict as they see fit.
- If IMT witnesses technical partners overstepping CBO boundaries, such as abusing their power, they will address it in the moment. Examples of how this may show up:
  - Technical partner talks over, dismisses, and condescends the CBO.
  - Technical partner asks the CBO to do work outside their scope.
- The IMT CE team will confer with the CBO to determine how the CBO wants to move forward.
- The IMT CE team will use its institutional power to intervene on behalf of CBOs when explicitly asked to do so by the CBO.



- The IMT CE team will offer itself as a mediator to a conflict resolution process, but any party can request outside mediation. If too much harm has been caused, a complete recovery of a relationship isn't always possible or necessarily desirable. Consistent harm can turn into abuse and total loss of trust. The harmed party always has the right to exit the collaboration without repercussions ([see MOU Section 7](#)).
- If the CBO wants to continue collaborating with the technical partner, we will use the [Restorative Just Culture Checklist](#) by Sidney Dekker (or another guide of their choosing).
- Technical partners, CBOs, and IMT can also request outside mediation and this request supersedes any requests to work through conflict internally.

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN CBOS AND BUILDING INDUSTRY MEMBERS?

- IMT respects CBOs' ability to speak for themselves and address the conflict as they see fit.
- If IMT witnesses building industry members (Hub representatives, developers, utility representatives, architects, business leaders, etc.) overstepping CBO boundaries or abusing their power, IMT will name it at the moment. Examples of how this can show up include:
  - Building industry representatives talk over, dismiss, and condescend to or disrespect the CBO.
  - Building industry representatives ask the CBO to do work outside their scope.
  - Building industry representatives ridicules a community solution.
- The IMT CE team will confer with the CBO to determine how the CBO wants to move forward.
- The IMT CE team will use its institutional power to intervene on behalf of CBOs when explicitly asked to do so by the CBO.
- The IMT CE team will offer itself as a mediator to a conflict resolution process, but any party can request outside facilitation. However, if too much harm has been caused, a complete recovery of a relationship isn't always possible or necessarily desirable. Consistent harm can turn into abuse, and total loss of trust. The harmed party always has the right to exit the collaboration ([see MOU Section 7](#)).
- If the CBO wants to continue collaborating with the building industry members, we will use the [Restorative Just Culture Checklist](#) by Sidney Dekker (or another one of their choosing).
- Building industry members, CBOs, and IMT can also request outside mediation and this request supersedes any requests to work through conflict internally.

## HOW DOES IMT ADDRESS CONFLICT BETWEEN CBOS AND ALL OTHER IMT STAKEHOLDERS?

White supremacy culture enables working dynamics where power holders feel entitled to a 'right to comfort', 'power hoarding', and demonstrate 'defensiveness' when they're held accountable for problematic statements or actions. This can sometimes lead to the aggressor weaponizing the discomfort of the person harmed and maligning the person who challenged them as a perpetrator of harm. However, there could be instances in which the CBO representative is the person actually causing harm.

- Our first step will always be to revisit [white supremacy characteristics](#), recall or observe certain behaviors, and determine whether or not the alleged harm is expressing itself as white supremacy in disguise.
- If IMT witnesses a CBO partner say or do something genuinely inappropriate (e.g. threats of violence, making racist or misogynist comments, etc.) IMT will name the harm that occurred in the moment.
- IMT will follow up with the person who was harmed afterward and ask how they would like to move forward.
  - If needed, IMT can facilitate a conversation utilizing Racial Equity Tools, and the Restorative Just Culture Checklist.
  - However, any party can request outside mediation and this request supersedes any requests to work through conflict internally.



## ENDING THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP

If no resolution can be achieved through the steps listed above, the parties involved may terminate their participation immediately by written notice according to the following conditions:

1. **Failure to uphold guiding principles:** Either party may terminate its participation in this agreement if another party fails to uphold the principles and values set forth in Guiding Principles.
2. **For cause:** Any party may terminate the agreement if the terms of the agreement or any attachments are breached and such breach is not corrected within a timely manner after written notice is provided of the breach.
3. **Failure to achieve milestones:** Either party may terminate this agreement if the agreed-upon scope is unable to be met within the timeframe and parameters initially set out and included in the agreement.

In the event either party believes these conditions exist, that party may notify IMT and the other party in writing. All parties have 15 days in which to remedy the condition to the satisfaction of both the local partner and IMT.



