Purpose
The purpose of this tool is to provide partnering agencies with an understanding of strategies and processes for resolving differences and alleviating conflict within a partnership.
While some conflict may be positive (e.g. allow for airing of views and building new understandings), conflict can be detrimental to a partnership.

Outlined below are tips for resolving conflict informally. All partnerships should have a formal process in place to resolve conflicts that cannot be dealt with on an informal basis.

This tool addresses the following issues:

1. **Types of Conflicts**
2. **How Power Affects Conflict**
3. **Tips for Resolving Conflict Informally**
4. **Formal Process for Resolving Conflict**

1. **Types of Conflict**

It is important to understand the types of conflict that exist to assist in resolving the conflict.

Types of Conflict	Sources of Conflict
Communication conflicts	Misunderstandings, assumptions, lack of information, misinformation, different languages
Structural conflicts	Poor processes, inappropriate structures or systems, time constraints
Relationship conflicts	Stereotypes, fear, distorted perceptions, unrealistic expectations, use of power, male/ female differences; personal conflicts
Interest conflicts	Differences in needs, interests and preferences
Value conflicts	Opposing beliefs, views, values or philosophies. This can stem from cultural differences of individuals or groups; cross cultural conflicts

Can you identify any other types of conflicts?
Understanding the possible types of conflict will help you recognize when conflict is occurring. There may be warning signs, such as missed meetings, low morale, activities being delayed or not finished, etc. Of what other warning signs are you aware?

2. **How Does Power Affect Conflict?**

- Power can be defined as the degree to which we are able to advance our own goals and influence others.
- Power is largely a matter of perception – how we perceive our own power and how our power is viewed by others.
- Power is dynamic rather than static, in that power relationships between people in conflict shifts throughout the conflict.
- Power can be used constructively to lessen conflict or destructively to increase conflict.

If You Recognize You Have More Power - What Can You Do?
- Select a location most comfortable to the other party to work through the conflict.
- Share resources that you have, such as information and expertise.

- Be willing to listen to the other party first – genuinely listen.
- Speak in a friendly, welcoming, and open manner.
- Do not intimidate or retaliate.
- Respond non-defensively.
- Seek a "level playing field" so that the process feels fair to both parties.
- Back off from your position and be willing to look at a variety of ways to meet the needs of both parties. Look for alternatives.
- **What else can you do?**

If You Believe You Have Less Power – What Can You Do?

- Find ways to increase your power and influence. Lessen your dependence on the other party's source of power.
- Identify your own resources and skills.
- If timing affects the balance of power, consider waiting for a time that may work better.
- Bring the power imbalance into the open and discuss it with your partner.
- Assert yourself and continue to keep your interests on the table, while continuing to listen and acknowledge the other party's interests.
- If asserting yourself results in the other party exerting his or her power over you, shift temporarily from a focus on your own interests to a focus on the other party's interests.
- Ask an outsider to assist, if you cannot deal with it on your own.
- **What else can you do?**

3. **Tips for Resolving Conflict Informally**

   1. All attempts should be made to resolve conflict informally.
   2. Any conflict that arises should be resolved in a timely manner.
   3. It is important to recognize that different individuals and groups have different ways of dealing with conflict. Some groups deal with conflict by avoiding it and removing themselves from the situation.
   4. The following chart outlines ways to deal with specific types of conflict:

<u>Conflict type</u>	<u>Ways to resolve</u>
Communication	- define terms - clarify assumptions - check interpretation of information
Structural	- design process to satisfy both parties - adjust timelines and deadlines - analyze the context of the conflict
Relationship	- show concern for others' point of view - remain non-defensive/ non-judgmental - keep emotions in check - check power imbalance
Interests	- de-emphasize position - look for common interests - be ready to accommodate and compromise
Values	- look for common goals/ values - acknowledge value differences - show respect for differing value systems

What other ways are there to resolve conflict?

Both internal and external elements work together to resolve conflict.

The **internal elements** deal with how people think and feel about the conflict and each other.

The **external elements** are the actions, words, and non-verbal messages given to others in the process of resolving conflict.

Checklist of Internal Elements

- ☐ **Awareness** – Are you aware of your own and the other party's perceptions, feelings, values, beliefs, fears, concerns, assumptions, and expectations with regard to the conflict?
- ☐ **Readiness** – Are you prepared to resolve the conflict? Are you sensitive to the readiness of the other party? Is the timing right? Are you emotionally and psychologically ready? Are you in a frame of mind that is ready to resolve the conflict?
- ☐ **Understanding** – Have you shifted toward a better understanding of the conflict?
  This shift includes:
    - Being open and willing to acknowledge the other person's experiences
    - Withdrawing judgment
    - Seeking new information
    - Allowing new information to influence you
    - Being able to accept differences
    - Looking for and building on similarities and common ground
- ☐ **Reflection** – Are you able to absorb all that has gone on and to step back and look at the "big picture"? The purpose of reflection is to learn from the conflict and gain skills and abilities to deal effectively when a new conflict arises.

Checklist of External Elements

- ☐ **Initiating –** Have you taken an action to approach the other party for the purpose of   resolving the conflict?
    - Initiating involves a certain amount of risk.
    - Be responsive to the other person's readiness and reaction to your approach.
    - Check the style of your approach. Being assertive may cause defensiveness.   This should be balanced with empathy.
- ☐ **Framing** – Have you described the conflict in a way that would promote a more collaborative climate and expand thinking?
    - Shift from stating a position (e.g., "I want" or "I do not want") to express an issue or interest (e.g., "I would like to discuss…")
    - Depersonalize the conflict (e.g. "you have caused a lot of problems with the way you have restructured to this restructuring process is a difficult one").
- ☐ **Exploring** – Have you explored ways to reach a new understanding of the conflict and the other party?
    - Learn what underlies the dispute
    - Understand the nature of the conflict
    - Understand the knowledge, interests, needs, values, and beliefs of both parties
    - Work through differences without judgment or blame
- ☐ **Closure** – Have you changed the way you feel about the other party and resolved the issues in the dispute? **True closure occurs when both the "heart" and the "head" have let go of the conflict.**

4. Formal Process for Resolving Conflict

If informal processes have been unsuccessful in dealing with conflict, more formal processes will need to be used. All partnerships should identify formal processes for resolving conflict. This should be identified in the partnership agreement.

Formal processes should include:

1. Collect the required information to deal with the conflict.
    a. Develop team building exercises.
2. Identify a person within the partnerships who has the skills to deal with conflict situations. If such a person is not available, identify a person outside the partnership to act as a mediator. A third party may be more objective and effective. Determine if your funder can assist.
3. Ensure the person selected is credible and approved by all parties to the conflict.
4. Document results of the mediation.
5. Communicate results to the partners to ensure there is agreement.