

Guidelines for Dealing with Activist Groups

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If you think they're "vultures," remember that vultures don't kill anything; they eat carrion, dead meat. If you stop committing suicide, the vultures will leave you alone.

1. Don't assume they are your enemy, sworn to polarize rather than collaborate.
2. Understand that collaboration is a difficult option for activist groups; you need to be patient and generous.
3. Understand that collaboration is virtually all gain for the company or agency; you can afford to be patient and generous.
4. Understand that your own resistance to collaboration may be grounded in psychology rather than strategy; take it seriously and consider moving beyond it.
5. Expect activists to set conditions; accept them where you can.
6. Expect activists to use what they learn against you; accept that, too, where you can.
7. When activists are making trouble inside – in a Community Advisory Panel, for example – be forbearing, and let others lose patience instead of you.
8. Genuinely try to get activists on the inside – but don't despair if you fail, and don't stop trying.
9. Treat activists with respect, even if they are disrespectful to you.
10. Don't accept false claims or mistreatment.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Dealing with abusive stakeholders (Nov 2002) – www.psandman.com/gst2002.htm#julie
- The Outrage Industries: The Role of Journalists and Activists in Risk Controversies (Mar 2006) – www.psandman.com/col/outrage.htm

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