

# E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

## City Park: Community Collaboration and Rotating Facilitator Exercise

### GENERAL INFORMATION

City Park is a 10-acre stretch of open space along the west bank of Rocky Branch Creek in Rockmont, a city of about 50,000. The park, which was donated to the city in the 1930s by a wealthy benefactor, was originally developed as a "nature garden" by the owner. The city has kept it in its natural state since inheriting it 70 years ago. Over time, trees that were planted along the creek banks have grown and the park is now thickly vegetated with a variety of domestic and exotic species. Some of the trees, shrubs and flowering plants in the park are found nowhere else in the state. Running through the park along the creek bank is a paved path/bikeway that connects the park to other paths and greenways in Rockmont. A small parking lot on the south side of the park accommodates about 35 cars.

The park is bordered on the west by an established neighborhood of upper-middle class homes, remnants of the original estate. This area is called the West Rock Neighborhood. The east side of the creek was recently subdivided and developed with newer, but lower-priced single-family homes. The new subdivision is known as East Creek Estates. There are two new pedestrian/bike bridges that span the creek and provide access to the park from East Creek Estates. A small, aging business district runs along the north side of the park. On the south, historic Rocky Branch Church and its education building face the park.

This simulation was a winner in our 2011-12 "Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving" teaching case and simulation competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by John B. Stephens and Ricardo S. Morse of the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill. This case is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARCC, part of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University's Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC). This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the authors are given full credit for their work.

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The heavy vegetation in the park has been cited as a danger and a nuisance by many in Rockmont. Homeless people often use the park as a shelter. Over the past couple of years rowdy groups from other parts of town have used the park as a gathering spot for hanging out. It is common to find wine and beer bottles down by the creek on Monday mornings. Last spring, a local teenager, on her way home from the movies, was sexually assaulted in the park.

Fearing that the park will become a crime haven, the East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association has petitioned the Rockmont Parks Department to remove most of the trees and shrubs and build a ball field, playground, and tennis courts. As an additional safety measure, they propose to remove the north and south ends of the bike path and convert what remains to a narrow footpath.

Most of the residents of the West Rock Neighborhood are opposed to such a plan. The traffic and noise that such a park would generate pose an unacceptable intrusion into this quiet, staid neighborhood. More importantly, the visual impacts would certainly reduce the value of properties that abut the park. The normally united neighborhoods are divided over the issue of what to do about the park.

The Rockmont Parks Master Plan, seeing a growing demand for sport and play facilities, calls for the construction of three additional ball fields across the next 10 years. There are four other parks in the city: two of which have ball fields. The Master Plan calls for the two parks with ball fields to add one new ball field each, and for a new park to have a ball field. Steps to acquire land for the new park have been put on hold.

The Parks Department drafted a site plan for the East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association proposal, but has not taken a stand on the proposed changes. The City Council will not act unless a consensus is reached by all relevant stakeholders.

At the manager's suggestion, the City Council has appointed an ad hoc committee of citizens to develop options for the future of City Park. The manager has asked the assistant to the manager to facilitate the initial meeting of that citizens' committee.

### **Stakeholders for this Exercise:**

1. Assistant to the City Manager
2. Parkside Merchants Association
3. West Rock Neighborhood
4. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Vice-Chair
5. East Creek Estates
6. Rockmont Greenway Committee Chair (optional)
7. Rocky Branch Church (optional)

## **SKILLS AND OUTCOMES BY MEETING**

### **Stakeholders:**

- Manager's Assistant
- Spokesperson, Parkside Merchants Association
- Chair, Rockmont Greenway Committee
- Vice Chair, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB)
- President, East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association
- Member, Rocky Branch Church
- Representative of West Rock Neighborhood

### **Meeting 1 (First meeting of stakeholder group)**

**Facilitator: Manager's Assistant**

#### Skills

1. Effective meetings (agendas, preparation, roles, etc.)
2. Roles – managing a stakeholder as facilitator
3. Ground rules
4. Agreement on objectives, purpose

#### Desired outcomes for this meeting (to assure that the group moves forward):

1. Summarize and agree on purpose of group
  2. Determine if interests/stakeholders are absent and what to do
  3. Adopt ground rules for the group
  4. Address how facilitator/s can participate effectively: Group's understanding and comfort on how facilitator guides the meeting and represents his/her interests
  5. Set agenda for next meeting
- 

### **Meeting 2**

**Facilitator: Spokesperson, Parkside Merchants Association**

#### Skills

1. Naming/framing issues as desired outcomes
2. Distinguishing between positions and interests
3. Identifying different, similar and complementary interests
4. Building rapport and trust

#### Desired outcomes for this meeting:

1. Understand stakeholder interests and values
  2. Respectful exchange of views
  3. Identify points for discussion
  4. Set agenda for next meeting
-

### **Meeting 3**

**Co-Facilitators:**      **Chair, Rockmont Greenway Committee**  
                                 **Vice Chair, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB)**

#### Skills

1. Brainstorming or Idea-writing
2. Questions that help generate creative ideas
3. Co-facilitation
4. Translating interests into criteria
5. Clearly defining criteria

#### Desired outcomes for this meeting:

1. A range of options are identified
  2. Criteria for assessing options
  3. Clarity on who might be able to act on particular options
  4. Set agenda for next meeting
- 

### **Meeting 4**

**Co-Facilitators:**      **President, East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association**  
                                 **Representative, Rocky Branch Church**

#### Skills

1. Formulating possible solutions – meeting stakeholder interests
2. Using clear decision rules, levels of agreement tool to *test for consensus*

#### Desired outcomes for this meeting:

1. Agreement of list of recommended actions: agreement on the “What”
  2. Set agenda for next meeting
- 

### **Meeting 5**

**Facilitator: Representative of West Rock Neighborhood**

#### Skills

1. Apply action planning template
2. Coordination: timing of actions
3. Identifying challenges to implementation and strategies for overcoming them

#### Desired outcomes for this meeting

1. Clear implementation steps: agreement on the “How”
2. Agreement on methods of communication, monitoring, possible adaptation
3. Clarity on whether this group will need to reconvene or monitor/adapt implementation

## COACHES PREPARATION

### Overview

- ✓ Advise facilitators prior to each meeting (for this you will need to be familiar with all 5 facilitation skills lessons).
- ✓ Observe meetings, prepare feedback.
- ✓ Lead de-brief sessions at end of each meeting (see suggested questions below).
- ✓ Help groups stay on time (BRING A CLOCK OR WATCH!).

### Background

Simulation is for participants to practice skills for effective group collaboration:

1. Engage stakeholders on an issue they care about
2. Help them decide how they will work together
3. Help them explore their interests regarding the issue
4. Help them explore causes/effects regarding the issue
5. Help them decide what to do
6. Help them develop an action plan to do it

### Information

General Information, map and Roles – overview; read after the briefing. Possible map questions – see #5, below.

Briefing's key focus: the facilitation skills to be reviewed/taught for Meetings 1-5.

Other considerations:

1. *Debriefing Questions* - a general guide, follow the nature of the meeting for detailed questions. DO NOT have to have the group address each question in each debrief – there are only 10 minutes for debriefs.

- a) Were the roles played realistically?
- b) Did you meet your objective/s for this meeting?
- c) What helped the group work well and/or meet the objective/s for this meeting?
- d) What hindered the group? What difficulties were encountered and how were they handled?
- e) What do you want to do differently next time?

2. *Identification of missing stakeholders*. Participants may believe that collaboration is hindered/impossible without involvement of others. Example: to address safety issues in the park, the police department. Guide the group to address missing stakeholder/s and, as realistically as possible, have one or more of the participants bring those concerns to the table. Example: manger's assistant can contact a police department official to get perspective, consider possible solutions, and report that information to the group.

3. *People "going easy" in role*. We think there may be incentives for the participants to be too agreeable. Since each person will be facilitating, and wanting to be "successful" by helping the group reach the objectives for their meeting, a certain amount of sympathy and/or self-interest may prompt people in their roles to be agreeable. Pay attention to this element (note Debrief Question #1) and as needed, prompt them to focus on interests and positions; what their constituents will think about their flexibility/compromises; and

other ways they may pursue their interests (the ability to go outside the group to the head of the parks department, the manager, or the city council).

4. *If the meeting does not reach its objectives at the end of time for a particular meeting.* The group will have to address if they “fall short” of the target for each meeting. Topics or objectives may carry over to the next meeting (with or without the same facilitator), or may need to be modified to do work in a realistic fashion and stay on time.

5. *Map - notes on locations and symbols.* State listed trees are shown with X (a note about this is in the left lower corner). If someone asks, state listed trees are established by the state department of agriculture as trees that are rare and of high value. Private property owners need a permit to remove or disturb the trees. State listed trees on public lands can only be disturbed after review by the state botanist, which is an even more stringent standard than for the permit required for private property owners.

## **POTENTIAL DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS**

Faculty coach will lead the debriefings and may also raise other points for discussion. Participants can raise other topics or questions, too.

(Only 10 minutes allotted for each debriefing session, so not all questions can be discussed after each meeting.)

- Were the roles played realistically?
- Did you meet your objective(s) for this meeting?
- What helped the group work well and/or meet the objective/s for this meeting?
- What hindered the group? What difficulties were encountered and how were they handled?
- What do you want to do differently next time?

## **Assistant to the City Manager**

The manager has asked you to work with this group. You see it as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate your facilitative leadership skills.

You have been asked by the manager to:

- a) Keep an eye on the Vice Chair of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The Vice Chair tends to think solutions are easy, and there will always be resources from somewhere to make people happy. The manager told you there is some grant application in the works for city parks, but you should make sure the group knows it is not a certain source of funding.
- b) Remind the group about resource limitations of the city – there are lots of demands from areas other than parks, so what they propose should probably be modest in terms of new resources (money, staff time, etc.).
- c) Be sure to help the group think of lots of alternatives – don't let people get locked into positions.

You enjoy the greenway in the park since it is part of one of your jogging routes. Also, many of your friends who are parents of young children complain about the lack of play space and equipment for their children in city parks.

## Vice Chair, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

You've served on the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) for six years, and have been vice chair for two. Since you are retired, you often sit in on these kinds of groups about conflicting uses of city parks. You've seen this kind of spat before, and it all works out in the end.

The advisory board has been working with the department staff on an ambitious grant application. The general theme is a "Green Handshake," which describes the goals of the grant as a better fit of human needs and environmental protection. The grant would help four of the ten city parks, and City Park is the second priority on the list.

However, the advisory group wanted to wait until the application was done before informing all city residents and to meet with neighbors of particular parks. Given what you have heard about possible changes in City Park, you are authorized to tell them – in general – about the grant proposal. The grant would address:

- a) Native plants and eco-friendly uses—there has been an exciting discovery: the sap of the Carolinense Oak can be refined into an adhesive twice as strong as and more water resistant than petroleum-based adhesives. The grant proposes to team with plant geneticists from the state university system to selectively test rare plants and trees in Rockmont Parks for other eco-friendly products. Making the city's approach to the environment "business-friendly" is a top priority of the mayor.
- b) Environmental education – This is a big interest for the chair of your board, who is a biology teacher. Parks should be an extension of schools, truly offering field trips, to teach about geology and zoology and other subjects. The grant would support permanent displays and special plantings. The superintendent of schools is on board.
- c). Special ballpark turf - The grant would be combined with money and expertise from Monsanto Corporation to build 3 ballparks with a special turf that is more durable, can be used year-round, and requires less maintenance. The key requirement is that the fields not be used for more than two days in a row, and no more than four days in a week. These limitations are necessary to maintain the durability of the turf. You know these limits will cause problems with sports leagues, who already feel there are not enough ballparks. There would be no pitching mound, so the fields could be used for softball, kids' baseball, and other field sports like soccer and Ultimate Frisbee.

The top priorities in the grant are items #2 and #3 and the main focus is to benefit children up to age ten, since Rockmont's demography shows a "baby bulge" of children in the infant-to-two-year-old segment. It is not clear that City Park will be one of the sites for item #3 of the grant. However, if this group can agree to build some kind of ball field, you would recommend that it become part of the grant.

The advisory panel is currently assessing other options for ball fields. The report is due in three months, and will cover possible partnerships with schools, the YMCA, and two outlying industrial plants that have large green spaces on their property.

## **Representative of West Rock Neighborhood**

You have lived in the West Rock Neighborhood for 25 years. Your four children practically grew up in City Park. The park is an island of serenity in an otherwise crazy world, and you intend to keep it that way.

The idea of ball fields and playgrounds in City Park is preposterous. A major concern of yours and your neighbors is that the proposed park development will devalue the properties of West Rock homeowners.

Crime is also an issue. The police have been called to your neighborhood twice in the last six months to respond to burglaries. You have contacted the city's crime prevention unit about your concerns. They have agreed to work with you and other neighborhoods around the park to improve security. They will meet with you next week, separate from this group dealing with City Park.

You use the park regularly for evening walks and to enjoy in your favorite activity: bird watching. However, since they paved the path through the park six years ago, it has become more difficult for you to enjoy the park. This "sport" of in-line skating has gotten out of hand. Why, just last weekend you were nearly run over by some nut in spandex who came barreling past you at 30 mph without so much of an "excuse me!"

Most of your neighbors agree that the bike path has detracted from the park's primary value: a quiet, natural, open space.

## **President, East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association**

You are the parent of three young children who like to play in the park. You and your neighbors fear for your children's safety. You want a place where children can go to play and be with their friends and you don't want to have to worry about what they'll see or hear, or, worse yet, what some thug may do to harm them.

You feel that the bike path makes the park too accessible to people from all parts of town, and contributes to the "hang-out" atmosphere of the park.

You also feel that the park needs more amenities for playing -- it needs to be a park for families. The natural areas are nice, but they are not safe.

You currently jog in the park every day after work, and appreciate the fact that you have a public space so near to your house.

You are a little league baseball coach and would like to have a field nearby to have practices and games.

The proposal shown on the map incorporates ideas from several people. While you like the ball fields and the playground area better than the other changes the East Creek Estates Neighborhood Association has proposed, you are expected to support the Neighborhood Association's proposal. However, you did tell your neighbors that you are not certain all the changes desired can be made, due to limits on city resources and possible opposition by other stakeholders.

## **Spokesperson, Parkside Merchants Association**

As owner of Easley Hardware, you have seen this park and neighborhood change. You are the third generation of Easleys providing friendly service of hardware, rental equipment (from tillers and carpet cleaners to moving vans), and appliance and small engine repair. You just stepped down as president of the Parkside Merchants Association, but you were asked to represent them on this group.

There have been almost two decades of decline among the businesses on the north side of the park, which you represent. Several buildings were boarded up for years at a time. Eight years ago, there were two arsons. Anytime you told people your business was in “Parkside” they almost took a step away from you! They “knew” the area was unsafe and dilapidated.

Thank goodness that the last five years have seen some revitalization. Four years ago, an ABC store and small dental practice came in, due to the tax credits and promises of better police protection. Then a specialty baby clothes and toy store opened, and then a grill that caters to commuters and working class people. Within the last two years a Kinko’s and an Internet Café have opened.

On the north side of the park between the West Rock neighborhood and the creek, there are those seven businesses and four buildings of older homes divided into four- to six-unit apartments.

Parkside Merchants Association (PMA) wants you to pursue three things:

- 1) Parking – there are not enough spaces for the growing traffic to the businesses. Since people were desperate to do anything to turn things around in recent time, the off-street parking requirements were reduced for the ABC store and the dentistry. You got a variance to convert some of your parking lot into a garden store area, and to store rental equipment. The proposal the PMA passed last month is to have the city modify the park across from the business area to provide more parking. The best solution would be to have a parking lot in the park. It would help people access the park, but also allow for the high turnover of vehicles for the grill, ABC store, dentist, and other businesses. If that is not possible, your fallback position is to create angled parking, simply widening the road to create the parking spaces.

- 2) Park beautification – the PMA proposes adding picnic tables and plantings of bushes and trees along the north side of the park. The Internet Café is really pushing for this, since their wireless zone extends into half the park. Again, you think this will help business. PMA is willing to match the city’s investment one for one up to \$5,000 for this work.

- 3) Reducing crime, increasing the perception of safety – this is the biggest concern. Even though there has been a turnaround, the bad reputation for “Parkside” remains. You know the vagrants down by the creek are the biggest problem. If you had your way, you’d get rid of the ABC store, but that is not going to happen. So, anything that contributes to safety, and helps publicize the perception of safety is a high priority for the PMA.

## **Chair, Rockmont Greenway Committee**

The Rockmont Greenway Committee oversees construction and maintenance of the city's pedestrian and bike paths. You manage a sizeable budget used for greenway maintenance and acquisition. The money comes from city government, some neighborhood associations, and regular fundraisers by environmental and civic groups.

The City Park greenway is a crucial link in Rockmont's award-winning greenway system. The City Park section is one of two greenways along Rocky Branch Creek. The Rockmont Greenways Plan envisions a third greenway along the creek, north of City Park, to eventually link the downtown area to North Rockmont.

You are alarmed that the East Creek Neighborhood Association proposal calls for the removal of the paved section through the park. Your committee is indifferent about whether the park remains a natural area or if it supports ball fields and play grounds. You want to keep the greenway in the park as it is: accessible for bikes, strollers and pedestrians.

One group that would also be affected by the proposed closing of the greenway is the Concerned Parents of Rockmont. They have been strong advocates of a system of safe bike and pedestrian paths throughout Rockmont's neighborhoods.

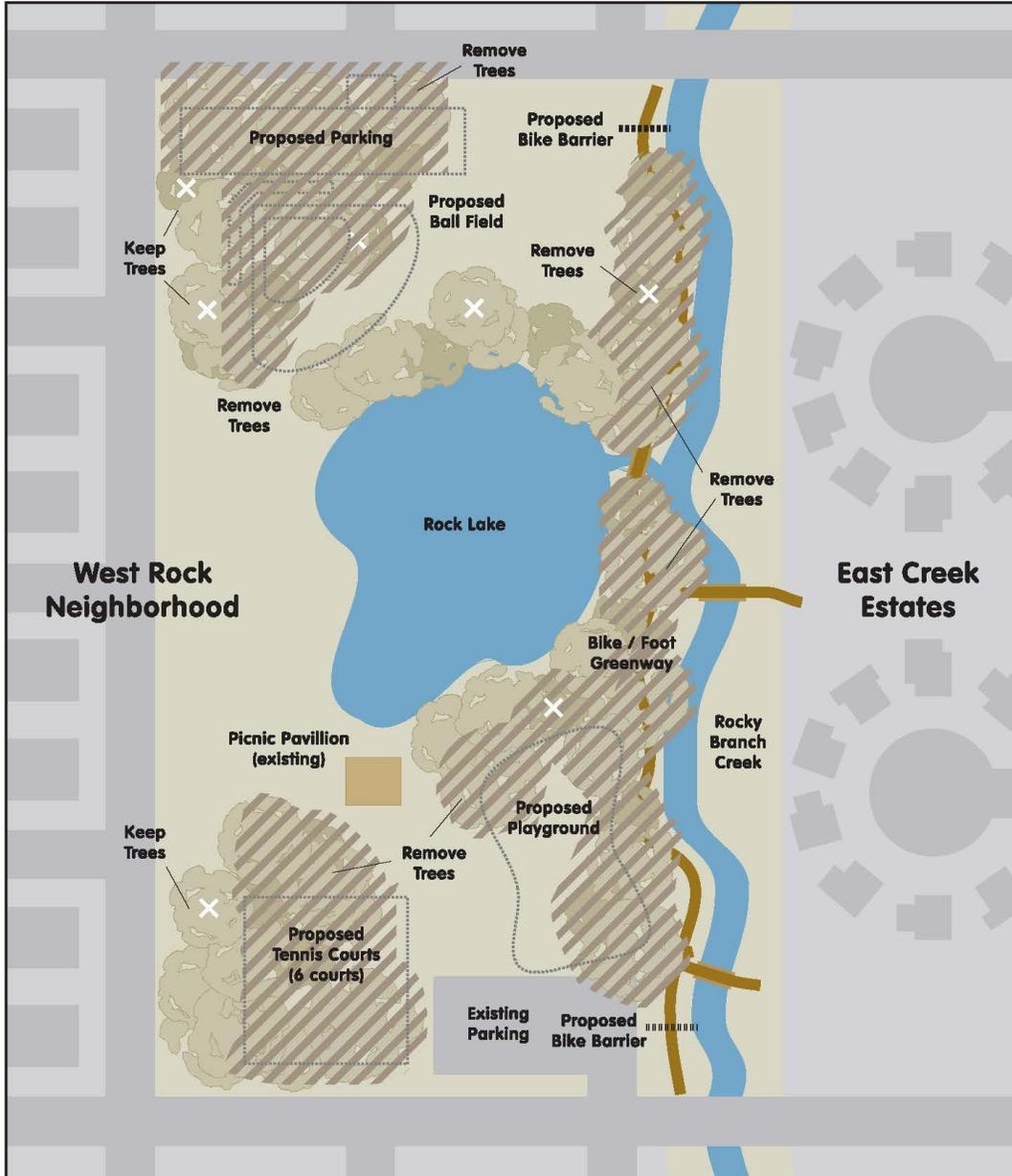
## **Representative of Rocky Branch Church**

As a life-long resident of Rockmont, you have a very deep attachment to the community and to Rocky Branch Church. In fact, your family has been associated with the church since its founding. Even though you live across town, you spend a great deal of time at the church. You've heard folks say you are one of its pillars.

The beauty of the area around the church, including City Park, means a great deal to you. But you are also interested in helping Rockmont thrive. It is particularly important, you think, for there to be healthy opportunities for young people to learn to be productive, caring citizens. You believe that for children to become good citizens, they need the support of the entire community. You have been part of a group at Rocky Branch Church that worked with other congregations to develop after school programs. You have been encouraged that many young people have begun to stay in their hometown and rear their own families here. You want to do what you and your church can to make Rockmont a healthy, attractive place for these young families and hope they will come to love the community as much as you do.

# MAP OF CITY PARK

## City Park Playground



X = State listed plant species

## **Background: Origin and Attribution for the Simulation**

*City Park: Community Collaboration and Rotating Facilitator Exercise* (this E-PARCC submission) is a modified version of the exercise “Peace Park Playground,” built from a sequence of creation, testing, development/expansion, refinement and adaptation across several instructors and two institutions.

### Creation

“Peace Park Playground” was written in 1996 by Dr. L. Steven Smutko, for use in the Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI), NC Cooperative Extension, North Carolina State University. Copyright © 1996.

### Development

Through testing with dozens of NRLI fellows, new roles and other refinements were created by Smutko and Dr. Mary Lou Addor (NRLI, NC Cooperative Extension, North Carolina State University) and Dr. John B. Stephens, (NRLI and UNC - Chapel Hill, School of Government – UNC-SOG). Copyright 1996 and 2005 by the Natural Resources Leadership Institute, North Carolina State University. All rights reserved.

Additional use by Stephens, with permission, at UNC-SOG 2004-2009 provided further testing and adaptations, including rotating the facilitator role among stakeholders.

### Adaptation

The adaptation of the core exercise for this submission comes from the work of Stephens and UNC-SOG colleagues Dr. Ricardo Morse, Dr. Carl Stenberg and Dr. Gordon Whitaker through team teaching in the Public Executive Leadership Academy 2008-2011. The adaptation is:

- a) No separate facilitator role: those duties rotate among the stakeholders;
- b) A 5-meeting structure with objectives and collaboration/facilitation skills specified;
- c) Debriefing questions; and
- d) Teaching Note.

The contemporary NRLI “Peace Park Playground” exercise includes roles not included in the SOG adaptation. Roles and teaching notes which focus on developing negotiation/collaboration skills for participants in stakeholder roles, and convening/facilitating skills for participants in other roles, are available for use, with permission, by contacting Dr. Mary Lou Addor at (919) 515-9602, [www.ncsu.edu/NRLI](http://www.ncsu.edu/NRLI).