

The Walker/Mallott Transition Conference Design

Alaska Gov. Bill Walker and Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott wanted a transition process that truly added value to their incoming Administration. They wanted Alaskans from all walks of life to identify Alaska's priority issues. Knowing that major challenges lie ahead and that there are divides on a number of key issues, they wanted to develop a strategy that would enable them to gain momentum on a non-partisan basis.

The charge to the transition conference was to discover what is important to Alaskans on key issue areas and what is considered possible in each area. Seventeen subject areas were identified and a cross-section of Alaskans was identified to participate in a two-day Transition Team Conference held on the University of Alaska Anchorage campus the weekend of November 22-23, 2014.

The afternoon prior to the kickoff of the conference, the 17 chairpersons were trained by professional coaches on a tightly defined and scheduled process designed to achieve real outcomes.

The theoretical foundation for the Conference process was derived from Professor Otto Shermer's "Theory U" model. The model is designed to generate consensus from widely divergent viewpoints. Depicted below, the process begins with openness and active listening to others, which leads to interest and suspension of pre-judgment of their ideas, which in turns leads to openness to new ideas which, when explored together, can lead to the generation of ideas/solutions never before imagined.

The evening prior to the teams going to work, a plenary session and dinner was held at the UAA Alaska Airlines Center during which the groups heard the charge from then Governor-elect Walker and then presentations from four economists on the fiscal outlook for Alaska. Despite the discouraging predictions, conference attendees arrived at the Saturday morning kick-off breakfast eager to address the tasks before them.

In seven 1.5 hour sessions, committee chairs guided their groups through a process which asked the following questions:

1. What are the unresolved problems/challenges in our topic area? To clarify: What's not working that needs to work? Identify five priorities.
2. For each priority issue, whose viewpoints (stakeholder) need to be considered to move forward?
3. On each issue, what does success/resolution for the good of all Alaskans look like?
4. For agreed upon success elements, what actions would it take to get to success?
5. Which actions do you feel most Alaskans would support?
6. On the success elements you consider that most Alaskans would not agree with, which ones do the majority of your group feel should be addressed?
7. For the success elements identified, what do you see as the barriers to Alaskans reaching consensus?
8. For each identified barrier, what actions would you propose to make progress against those barriers?

Lastly, groups were asked to identify areas and actions that they believe the new Administration could take now, and in the near future, in moving Alaska forward.

For the first time in recalled history, the transition team process was open to the public and the media. Public participation was limited to placing comments on “Parking Lot” flip charts in each team meeting room. Additionally, a comment box was also available in the commons where constituents could ask questions and leave comments. Reporters could attend any of the meetings spread over several buildings at the UAA Anchorage campus.

At the close of the two days, chairs presented a summary of their team’s work to all assembled, including the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Transition Co-Chairs. The draft summaries were finalized by the chairpersons and in some cases, the committees, and submitted for this document.