



FROM THE BOOK

Standing in the Middle

Trainer Discussion Prompts

Twenty ready-to-run prompt sets for trainers, lecturers, and team leads
working with the hundred practices.

20

PROMPT SETS

5

PARTS OF THE BOOK

20-40

MINUTES EACH

FORMAT

Solo · Pairs · Groups
Debate

FIELD

Real meetings, real
projects, real registers

SESSIONS

Build a session from
four fixed movements

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How to use these prompts

A companion resource to *Standing in the Middle: 100 Field Practices for Mediating Between Mines and Communities*

Thomas Gaultier, July 2026

If you teach with this book, this resource is for you: corporate trainers running community relations teams through it, lecturers building it into a negotiation or mediation course, NGO staff training community leaders and field officers. I built the book as 100 practices rather than 100 ideas because this material only sticks when people run it against their own projects, and the prompts below work the same way. They do not test recall. Each one asks participants to bring a real meeting, a promise, a rumor, or a grievance from their own work and put it under the practices.

Use them however your format allows. Assign a part as pre-reading and open the session with its solo reflection. Use the pair and small-group exercises as the working middle of a session, and the full-group debates when energy is high and you want the room to argue. Set the field assignments as homework whenever your group meets more than once; they need a real week in between. Each part gives you four prompts in a fixed order, solo reflection, then pair or small-group exercise, then full-group debate or case discussion, then field assignment, so you can build a session by picking one of each. Most prompts run in 20 to 40 minutes and work with groups from four to thirty; the solo reflections double as written assignments in university settings.

01 Communication and Facilitation Techniques

PART I, PRACTICES 1-20

Listening 1-5, speaking to be understood 6-10, facilitating the room 11-15, working across languages and cultures 16-20.

01 Solo reflection. Think back to the last tense meeting you walked into already knowing what you would say, and write down the first sentence you actually spoke after the other side finished. Hold it against Practices 1 and 2: was it a question, a paraphrase, or your opinion, and how long did you let the silence sit first (Practice 3)? As people share, listen for the ones who are certain they already listen well; Practice 1 opens the book because almost nobody is right about that.

02 Pairs. Bring the three technical terms you use most in front of communities: tailings, resettlement action plan, whatever your project vocabulary is. One partner translates each term into water, land, food, health, or money (Practice 6) while the other plays a resident and keeps asking what it changes on an ordinary Tuesday (Practice 7), then swap. Listen for the term neither partner can translate; by Practice 6's own test, that is the concept its user does not yet understand.

03 Full group. Take a meeting agenda someone in the room actually has to run in the next month and rebuild it together on the wall. Set the opening question everyone can answer (Practice 11), reorder the items so a winnable one comes first (Practice 14), and decide what must leave the room with a name and a date on it (Practice 15). Listen for agendas that open with a company presentation, and say so when you spot one; the room will recognize the pattern from its own projects.

04 Field assignment. Before the next session, run Practice 16 in full on a real meeting: fifteen minutes with your interpreter beforehand, ten afterward, and tell them you would rather be stopped than smoothed. During the meeting, keep your eyes on the community's faces while the interpreter speaks (Practice 18), and note every silence and what you did with it (Practice 20). Ask everyone to bring back one moment where the words and the faces disagreed; that moment is your opening material for the next session.

02 Interest and Need Management

PART II, PRACTICES 21-40

Mapping interests and fears 21-25, the voices that carry risk 26-30, gender and generation 31-35, turning needs into negotiable terms 36-40.

05 Solo reflection. Pick the stakeholder group on your project you understand least and build Practice 21's two columns from memory: what they want, what they dread. Then list the words, topics, and people most likely to detonate a meeting with them (Practice 24). Most participants discover the fear column is nearly empty; when someone says so, name it for the room, because a thin fear column means they have been negotiating against positions all along.

06 Small groups. In threes, read out who attended your last community meeting, from memory if memory is all you have. The other two interrogate the list: who was not in the room and why (Practice 26), who actually gets listened to as opposed to who holds the title (Practice 27), which objector could truly block the project (Practice 29), and how much of your picture comes from one liaison (Practice 30). Listen for the group that cannot say who was missing; absence nobody noticed is the finding.

07 Full-group debate. Write a proposition on the wall: cash compensation respects people's agency more than livelihood programs do. Split the room and make both sides argue from the practices rather than from preference: the lump sum spent and gone against the six and twelve month check (Practice 36), real alternatives to choose among (Practice 39), the space between offer and answer (Practice 40). Listen for arguments that never mention what people do to live; that omission is how compensation packages fail in the field.

08 Field assignment. Take one meeting you already have scheduled and re-test its time and place against the lives of the busiest and least mobile people who should be there (Practice 32). Separately, ask one woman and one young person what format would let them speak freely, and do not design it for them first (Practices 31 and 33). Bring back the answer that surprised you most; in my sessions it is usually about who else was going to be in the room.

03 Process Management

PART III, PRACTICES 41-60

Designing your presence 41-44, managing the company side 45-48, working with government 49-52, expectations and bad news 53-56, exit and handover 57-60.

09 Solo reflection. Write down the most recent time the company doubted your loyalty and the most recent time the community did. If both happened in the same month, Practice 45 reads that as evidence you are positioned correctly, so note honestly whether you treated it as failure. Then test yourself against Practices 42 and 44: could you say to a community, today, what you can decide, what you can carry forward, and what you cannot guarantee? Listen for practitioners who have never said their limits out loud; their next disappointed community is already forming.

10 Pairs. Bring one piece of bad news your project owes a community right now: a delayed commitment, a smaller job number than people expect, a road that will not move. Deliver it to your partner under the rules of Practices 54 and 55: no “we will try,” name the hope, state the decision, then stay quiet while the reaction comes, with your partner counting every vague phrase because each one gets remembered as a promise. Plan the second meeting together before you swap (Practice 56). Listen across the room for softeners; they are the habit this chapter argues against.

11 Full-group case discussion. Take one live case from the room where a government promise and a company promise have blurred together. As a group, map the chain of authority around it from local to national (Practice 49), find the moment the state’s commitment slid into the company’s ledger (Practice 51), and set the whole thing against the election calendar (Practice 52). Listen for anyone claiming the community knows the difference between the two promisors; Practice 51 exists because on the ground they usually do not.

12 Field assignment. Spend one hour this week in the community when nothing is wrong and nothing is scheduled, the market, the road, wherever people already are (Practice 41), and send one small update on your normal rhythm even if the honest content is that nothing has changed (Practice 43). Then answer Practice 57’s question in writing: would what you are building survive your absence? Make it concrete: what breaks within a month if you leave tomorrow? Have participants bring the list back; it doubles as their handover plan, and it shows you who in the room has built systems and who has built dependence on themselves.

04 De-escalation of Tension and Conflict

PART IV, PRACTICES 61-80

Reading and cooling the room 61-64, lowering the temperature by design 65-68, rumor and misinformation 69-72, the flashpoints of extractive work 73-76, regulating yourself 77-80.

13 Solo reflection. List the three things community members say or do that reliably spike you: the accusation you take personally, the interruption, the challenge to your honesty (Practice 77), and for each one write down what your body does first, since that signal arrives before your judgment does. Then check your last hard day against Practice 80: did you debrief it the same day, and with whom? Listen for the blank page; everyone has triggers, and a blank page only means the inventory has never been done.

14 Small groups. Bring one rumor currently circulating about your project, the wilder the better. In small groups, run each rumor through the sequence: what exactly have people heard (Practice 69), what fear sits underneath it (the question Practice 72's log is built on), which respected local voice could carry the correction (Practice 71), and what calm, checkable evidence answers it (Practice 70). Watch for the instinct to correct before asking; Practice 69 leads the chapter because that instinct loses, however well informed it is.

15 Full-group debate. Debate a proposition most operations argue about internally: a roadblock is a security matter before it is an engagement matter. Make the security side argue it honestly, and make the other side answer from the practices: the protest as a channel that failed upstream (Practice 76), the hundred ignored dust and noise complaints that came first (Practice 73), the spill the community heard about on social media before it heard from the company (Practice 75). Listen for containment vocabulary, manage, contain, defeat; Practice 76 was written against exactly those words.

16 Field assignment. Before your next difficult meeting, lower its temperature in advance and on purpose: scan the space in your first minutes instead of your notes (Practice 78), keep part of your attention on the room's temperature throughout (Practice 61), decide beforehand at what point you will call the break (Practice 64), and choose which old grievance you will acknowledge before the new agenda starts (Practice 65). Report back on which single move changed the meeting most. In my sessions the answer is acknowledgment more often than anything else, and the debrief on why is worth twenty minutes on its own.

05

Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

PART V, PRACTICES 81-100

Commitments and their tracking 81-85, grievances people trust 86-90, documentation and institutional memory 91-95, making the process visible 96-100.

17 Solo reflection. Write down, from memory, the last five promises your project made to a community. Mark which ones have a named owner and a date (Practice 82), which sit in a register that would survive your departure (Practices 81 and 84), and which are overdue right now (Practice 83). Listen for how many people cannot date a single one; the distance between five promises made and five promises trackable is the argument of this chapter.

18 Pairs. Explain your grievance path to your partner exactly as you would to a complainant: plain steps, who to tell, what happens next, how long it takes (Practice 86). Your partner pushes back as the complainant: how do I know you wrote down my words and not your version of them (Practice 87), when do I hear from you while nothing is resolved yet (Practice 88), and who decides this is closed (Practice 90)? If the explanation needs an organization chart, the community cannot use the mechanism. Listen for closure that still belongs to the company; Practice 90 calls that a conflict moved back onto the road.

19 Full group. Put Practice 85's hardest test to the room: would you show the community the same commitment tracker you keep, overdue items and all? Someone will resist, so have them argue the resistance seriously, and have the rest answer with Practice 96 (trust as a structure people can inspect), Practice 97 (hidden data gets assumed to be damning), and Practice 100 (saying plainly what you do not know). Listen for what the resistance is protecting; it is usually internal exposure rather than community reaction, and naming that out loud changes the debate.

20 Field assignment. After your next community meeting, circulate the summary within 48 hours, invite corrections, and include one line on how the meeting felt alongside what it decided (Practices 92 and 94). Then check where that record lives: would it survive a lost laptop, a resignation, a migration to a new system (Practice 95)? Bring the summary to the next session for critique against Practice 91: date, attendees, what was agreed, written while it was fresh. When memories conflict, the side with the record prevails, so the record has to deserve it.

Running a session on one practice

When you have an hour and one practice carries the weight, this is the sequence I use. It works as well with Practice 26 in a graduate seminar as with Practice 83 in a site office.

01 Read it aloud, five minutes. Have one participant read the whole practice to the room, essence line included. Reading aloud slows everyone down and puts the group inside the same text; do not summarize it yourself.

02 One round of first reactions, ten minutes. One sentence per person, no responses, no discussion yet. You are listening for the split between the people who recognize the practice from their own fieldwork and the people who resist it; the resisters set up the rest of your session.

03 Apply it to a live case, twenty-five to thirty minutes. One volunteer lays out a current, unresolved situation from their own project in five minutes, then the group works the practice against it: where it was followed, where it was skipped, what it demands next week. Hold the group to the practice itself; generic advice-giving is the failure mode.

04 Close on the In-the-field line, five to ten minutes. Read the line once more and go around the room: each person names the one thing they will do differently before you meet again. The line is written to be carried out of the room, so let it do that work.

Other companion resources

This set pairs with the Standards Crosswalk companion, which maps the 100 practices to the international standards your participants' organizations answer to; reach for it when a group needs to justify field practice in compliance language. Both live alongside the book's other materials at thomasgaultier.com/resources/sitm. If you run a training program on this material and want to compare notes, or want me in the room for a session, write to me at thomas@thomasgaultier.com.