

# Shuttle Diplomacy Decision Checklist & Session Planning Template

A Field-Ready Tool for Mine-Community Mediation

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Based on the GROUNDS Framework from Rebuild Grounds: A  
Mining-Focused Mediation Practitioner's Methodology

# PART 1: Five-Factor Decision Assessment

Use this scoring tool to determine whether shuttle diplomacy is the appropriate format for your mediation intervention.

## Factor 1: Conflict Escalation Stage

Level	Description	Score
Low	Early-stage disagreement. Parties have had limited negative interactions. Communication still relatively open.	1
Mid	Escalation has begun. Parties have made accusations, tensions visible, but violence not imminent. Trust eroding.	2
High	Severe escalation. Hostile rhetoric, previous violent incidents, strong polarization, safety concerns, paralyzed direct communication.	3

Your assessment:  Low (1)  Mid (2)  High (3)

## Factor 2: Communication Status

Answer each question. Score 1 for "Yes", 0 for "No".

- Question 1: Have parties stopped direct communication or are refusing to meet? (Yes = 1)
- Question 2: Are intermediaries currently relaying messages, or do parties only communicate through lawyers/representatives? (Yes = 1)
- Question 3: Is there evidence that each party misrepresents or distorts the other party's positions? (Yes = 1)

Total Score for Factor 2: \_\_\_ / 3

## Factor 3: Power Differential Severity

Assess the extent to which one party has substantially more organizational, economic, or political power than the other.

- Minimal (both parties have roughly equal negotiating capacity): Score 1
- Moderate (one party has advantage but both can advocate for themselves): Score 2
- Severe (one party is significantly disadvantaged; may fear speaking in joint sessions): Score 3

## Factor 4: Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Score based on presence of language differences, cultural norms around direct confrontation, or interpreter availability.

- None or minimal (same language, shared cultural context): Score 1
- Moderate (different languages but interpreter available; some cultural nuance differences): Score 2
- Significant (multiple language barriers, strong cultural norms against direct criticism, interpreters scarce): Score 3

## Factor 5: Safety Concerns

Assess whether there are safety risks that joint sessions would exacerbate.

- No credible safety concerns: Score 0
- Minor concerns (heated rhetoric but no history of violence): Score 1

Significant concerns (prior violence, credible threats, weapons present, or large volatile crowds): Score = AUTOMATIC SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

### Scoring Matrix and Decision

Total Score	Interpretation	Recommended Format
5-7	Low to moderate complexity. Parties can likely handle direct engagement.	Joint sessions viable (shuttle as alternative if dynamics shift)
8-11	Moderate complexity. Shuttle diplomacy recommended to manage communication and trust.	Shuttle diplomacy recommended (transition to joint sessions once rapport established)
12-15	High complexity. Direct engagement would likely escalate or fail. Shuttle is essential.	Shuttle diplomacy required (may transition to joint sessions later)
Safety Flag	Any significant safety concern (Factor 5 = "Significant")	Shuttle diplomacy mandatory (safety-first approach)

Your Total Score: \_\_\_\_

Based on your assessment, the recommended format is:

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## PART 2: Pre-Engagement Preparation (GROUNDS Phase 0: Groundwork)

Use this checklist to prepare your shuttle diplomacy process before the first party meeting.

### Stakeholder Mapping

- Identify all primary parties to the dispute
- Identify internal factions or divisions within each party (who speaks for whom?)
- Identify potential spoilers (those who may disrupt or oppose resolution)
- Identify influential community figures, elders, or decision-makers for each side
- Map decision-making authority: Who has formal authority? Who has informal influence?

### Venue and Logistics Selection

- Select neutral venue for Party A meetings (perceived as unbiased by all)
- Select neutral venue for Party B meetings
- Confirm both venues are physically safe, accessible, and culturally appropriate
- Arrange transport if needed (ensure no party member travels through hostile territory)
- Identify and brief interpreters (if multilingual mediation required)
- Identify cultural advisors or co-mediators familiar with each party's norms
- Plan timing to avoid conflicts with cultural/religious events, work schedules, or other obligations

### Background Information Gathering

- Collect public documents: permits, licenses, agreements, previous complaints, media coverage
- Interview neutral third parties (local officials, NGOs, observers) to understand dispute history
- Identify trigger events: What caused the escalation?
- Note any previous mediation or negotiation attempts and outcomes

### Readiness Assessment

- Both parties have agreed to participate in mediation (at least preliminary agreement)
- You have clarified the mediation process and format (shuttle diplomacy) with both parties
- Both parties understand confidentiality and its limits
- Both parties have committed to authorize representatives with decision-making authority
- Safety protocols are in place (if needed)

### Mediation Ground Rules (to be introduced in first sessions)

- Confidentiality protocol designed (see Part 3)
- Communication rules established (no hostile statements shared without consent)
- Agreement that you (the mediator) are neutral and impartial
- Understanding that mediation is voluntary; either party can withdraw

# PART 3: Confidentiality Protocol Template

Customize this protocol for your specific mediation and present it to both parties.

## Protocol Overview

Mediation Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Parties: \_\_\_\_\_

Mediator(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## Information Sharing Rules

The following information MAY be shared between parties (with explicit consent from the originating party):

- General positions on issues (e.g., "Party A wants the company to invest in water infrastructure")
- Proposals or settlement terms that each party agrees to share
- Questions or areas where each party seeks clarification or options

The following information is ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL and will NOT be shared:

- Private concerns, fears, or constraints disclosed to the mediator in separate sessions
- Internal party discussions or decision-making processes
- Admissions of fault, liability, or wrongdoing
- Settlement bottom lines or negotiating ranges (unless party authorizes sharing)
- Personal information about party representatives or their families

## Attribution Rules

How proposals will be presented to the other party:

- With full attribution (e.g., "Party A proposes...")
- Without attribution (e.g., "A possible approach would be...")
- Hybrid (some proposals attributed, others anonymous)

Default approach: \_\_\_\_\_

## Documentation and Notes

- Mediator will maintain confidential notes on key points and proposals (not shared without consent)
- All notes will be stored securely and destroyed after mediation process concludes
- Each party may take their own notes during separate sessions
- No recordings or photographs without explicit written consent from all parties

## Confidentiality Breach Protocol

If a party violates confidentiality (shares protected information publicly or with unauthorized persons):

1. Mediator will address the breach directly with the offending party
2. If breach is intentional or repeated, mediator may suspend or terminate mediation
3. The mediator will inform the other party that a breach has occurred (without revealing details)

## Acknowledgment

Both parties acknowledge that they have read and understood this confidentiality protocol.

Party A Representative: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Party B Representative: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mediator(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# PART 4: Session Planning Template (Repeatable for Each Shuttle Round)

Make a copy of this template for each round of shuttle visits. Use it to structure your preparation and capture key information.

## Session Basics

Round Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Party Being Visited: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue/Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Representatives Present:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Interpreter Present:  Yes  No (Name if yes: \_\_\_\_\_)

## Session Objectives

What do you hope to accomplish in this session? Be specific.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## GROUND(S) Phase(s) Being Addressed

Groundwork (G)  Rapport (R)  Organize (O)  Understand (U)  Navigate (N)  Deliberate (D)  Secure (S)

## Key Questions to Ask This Party

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Information You Have Permission to Share from the Other Party

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Proposals or Ideas to Test

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Cultural and Process Considerations for This Session

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Post-Session Notes

Key Concerns Expressed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Underlying Interests Identified:

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Red Lines (Non-Negotiables):

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Areas of Flexibility Detected:

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New Information Learned:

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Permission Granted to Share with Other Party:

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Items Requiring Follow-Up:

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Mediator Observations/Next Steps:

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## PART 5: GROUNDS Phase Tracker for Shuttle Mediation

Use this table to track progress through each GROUNDS phase and ensure you address all critical activities.

Phase	Objective in Shuttle Format	Key Activities	Readiness Question	Common Pitfalls
G (Groundwork)	Establish mediation structure and gather background information without bringing parties together yet.	Confidentiality briefing; stakeholder mapping; venue arrangement; background research; initial intake conversations with each party separately.	Both parties understand the process and have agreed to participate. You have baseline information on the dispute.	Moving too fast without fully understanding dispute history; overlooking spoilers or internal factions; setting unrealistic expectations about outcomes.
R (Rapport)	Build individual trust with each party in separate sessions. Establish psychological safety and credibility as a neutral mediator.	Active listening; validating concerns; demonstrating understanding; explaining mediation process clearly; allowing each party to tell their story without judgment; finding small early agreements.	Each party believes you understand their perspective, respects their concerns, and will not take sides. Trust is reflected in reduced defensiveness.	Appearing biased toward one party; dismissing a party's concerns; moving to problem-solving too quickly before rapport is solid; making promises you cannot keep.
O (Organize)	Convert raw grievances into a structured, agreed-upon agenda that both parties recognize as fair and complete.	Extract key issues from each party's grievances; group related issues; rank by priority and urgency; present organized agenda to both parties for validation; use shuttle format to refine until both parties agree on the issues to address.	Both parties agree that the agenda captures their main concerns and that the sequencing is fair. Neither party feels excluded or minimized.	Agenda becomes a weapon (one party claims the other was not heard); agenda becomes too large (unrealistic scope); treating all issues as equally urgent when some are pre-conditions for others.
U (Understand)	Move from stated positions to underlying interests. Help each party articulate what they really need, not just what they initially demanded.	Questioning techniques (Why? What would that give you? If we addressed X, would that help?); reframing positions as interests; exploring constraints and fears; mapping interests against the agenda; shuttle format allows testing options without commitment.	You can identify 2-3 overlapping interests between parties. Each party has articulated interests beyond their initial positions. Both parties recognize the legitimacy of the other's underlying needs.	Confusing positions with interests; asking questions that sound like you're taking sides; losing sight of the big picture by getting stuck on micro-details; assuming you understand interests when you have only heard positions.
N (Navigate)	Generate multiple possible solutions before evaluating them. Brainstorm widely, using shuttle format to create options safely.	Brainstorming sessions (separate for each party); creative option generation; mediator introduces options that neither party initially proposed (shuttle diplomacy advantage); separate invention from decision; test feasibility of ideas without committing parties.	Both parties have generated and considered at least 3-5 possible approaches. Creative options exist that neither party initially considered. Parties see possibilities, not just their original positions.	Premature evaluation (killing ideas before exploring them); mediator becomes advocate for one option; parties confuse brainstorming with commitment; failing to involve both parties in option generation.

Phase	Objective in Shuttle Format	Key Activities	Readiness Question	Common Pitfalls
D (Deliberate)	Reality test proposals. Help parties evaluate feasibility, durability, and mutual acceptability of potential agreements.	Cost-benefit analysis for each option; BATNA discussion (separately in shuttle format); feasibility assessment (Can we actually implement this?); durability assessment (Will this hold over time?); evaluating which options serve underlying interests best.	Parties have narrowed options to 1-2 that both see as viable. Each party understands the trade-offs and benefits. Both parties have compared options to their BATNA and see agreement as preferable.	Pushing parties toward agreement before they are ready; BATNA analysis creates despair rather than clarity; parties feeling trapped rather than empowered in deliberation; failing to revisit underlying interests during reality testing.
S (Secure)	Formalize agreement in clear language. Build in monitoring and dispute resolution mechanisms to ensure agreement holds.	Draft agreement language (SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound); specify implementation steps and timelines; assign responsibilities; define milestones and monitoring; include dispute resolution clause for implementation questions; signatures and commitment ceremony.	Agreement is documented in clear, specific terms both parties accept. Implementation timeline is defined. Both parties understand their obligations and how success will be measured. Parties are genuinely committed (not just complying).	Vague language that leaves room for interpretation disputes later; failing to specify timelines and responsibilities; assuming commitment when parties are only exhausted; inadequate dispute resolution mechanism for implementation questions.

## PART 6: Interest Mapping Worksheet

Complete a separate worksheet for each party. Use these mappings to identify overlapping interests and creative solution areas.

### Party Information

Party Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Representatives: \_\_\_\_\_

### Stated Positions

What this party explicitly says it wants or demands:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Underlying Interests

What this party actually needs (the "why" behind the positions):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Fears and Concerns

What worries this party most? What could go wrong in any agreement?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Constraints

What limits this party's flexibility? (budget, politics, technical limitations, community expectations, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Decision-Making Process

Who has formal authority to decide? \_\_\_\_\_

Who has informal influence? \_\_\_\_\_

Who must be consulted before agreement is final? \_\_\_\_\_

### Best Alternative to Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)

If mediation fails, what will this party do instead?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Overlapping Interests (Mediator to complete)

After interviewing both parties, identify areas where their interests align or can be bridged:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## PART 7: Proposal Development Tracker

Track each proposal from introduction to current status. Update after each shuttle round.

Prop #	Description	Source (Party/Mediator)	Party A Reaction	Party B Reaction	Current Status
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

**Status Definitions:**

Testing = Proposal presented to at least one party; feedback being collected

Accepted in Principle = Both parties see proposal as potentially viable; open to further discussion

Rejected = One or both parties have explicitly said no; proposal unlikely to move forward

Modified = Proposal has been revised based on feedback; new version being tested

## PART 8: Transition-to-Joint-Session Readiness Assessment

Use this checklist to evaluate whether parties are ready to move from shuttle diplomacy to face-to-face engagement.

### Trust Indicators

- Parties have kept at least 2 small agreements or commitments made during shuttle phase
- No confidentiality breaches by either party
- Language has become less hostile; accusations declining
- Each party speaks about the other with slightly more nuance (acknowledging some legitimate concerns)
- Each party has explicitly stated willingness to meet face-to-face

### Communication Indicators

- Parties are asking the mediator about the other side's perspective (curiosity, not dismissal)
- Parties express interest in understanding the other side's underlying needs
- Both parties have agreed to a joint agenda and see it as fair
- Parties are willing to listen (even if skeptical) to proposals from the other side

### Substantive Indicators

- Overlapping interests have been identified and both parties acknowledge them
- Preliminary agreement exists on at least one issue or sub-issue
- Both parties see movement; they believe progress is possible
- At least one creative option has gained traction (parties see potential in a proposal neither initially made)

### Practical Indicators

- Both parties have confirmed they will attend a joint meeting
- A neutral venue acceptable to both has been identified
- Safety concerns have been assessed and mitigated (if any)
- Ground rules for joint session have been agreed in principle

### Readiness Assessment Summary

Count the number of checked items above: \_\_\_\_\_

16-18 checks: Parties are ready for joint session

12-15 checks: Parties are close; consider one more shuttle round before joint meeting

< 12 checks: Continue shuttle diplomacy; parties not yet ready

### First Joint Session Format (if ready)

Recommended approach: Limited, structured agenda focusing on areas of agreement and easy wins.

- Session length: 60-90 minutes (keep first meeting short to manage tension)
- Format: Mediator-facilitated with opening statements from each party, discussion of 1-2 agenda items
- Fallback: If tensions rise, pivot back to shuttle diplomacy for that session
- Agreements captured in writing with clear action steps

### Post-Joint-Session Debrief

Meet separately with each party after first joint session to:

- Understand their perception of the meeting (positive or negative signals)
- Address any concerns or misunderstandings that arose
- Reinforce commitments and next steps
- Assess willingness to continue with more joint sessions

### Notes from Post-Session Debrief

Party A perspective: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Party B perspective: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation for next steps: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

