

Module 03

Critical Skills Development: Problem-Solving, Conflict Resolution, Equity, and More

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To support a more strategic and equitable approach to code compliance, Code Enforcement must develop strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills.

Inspectors should be trained in mediating or diffusing tense situations, bias awareness, and effective communication to foster trust with community members and improve compliance rates. Identifying third-party subject matter experts to help provide this type of training is likely needed.

MODULE OVERVIEW

GOAL	Enhance inspectors' interpersonal skills, including understanding and minimizing bias, de-escalation, communication, and problem-solving skills to better coordinate with property owners and neighbors
AUDIENCE	Code enforcement inspectors and staff
TRAINING STAFF	Third-party subject matter experts
TIMING	Initial training for current and new staff; provide targeted skills training annually (e.g., Year 1: problem solving; Year 2: implicit bias; Year 3: customer service, etc.)
TOPICS	Implicit bias and cultural competency; customer service; communication; problem-solving
MATERIALS	Any materials developed by external subject matter experts

Key Training Components

1 Prioritize Key Skills for a Compliance-Focused Approach

Critical skills include:

- Customer service training focused on tactics for interacting with owners, neighbors, and other community stakeholders
- Implicit bias and cultural competency training to build awareness of how internal biases with respect to race, class, and other factors influence decision-making
- Communication training to strengthen facilitation and public speaking skills
- Mediation and de-escalation training to strengthen conflict resolution strategies

2 Engage Third-Party Experts For Specialized Training

Local third-party experts include:

- [REI Workshops](#) (ThirdSpace ActionLab) and
- [Conflict Resolution Training](#) (Cleveland Mediation Center).

3 Learn from Leading Code Enforcement Organizations

Organizations that have existing content include:

[EduCode International Annual Conference](#)

- Conflict Resolution and Emotional Intelligence
- Leadership IMPACT – Coaching Skills & Leadership and Team Member Engagement
- Marketing Your Code Enforcement Department

[American Association of Code Enforcement Annual Conference](#)

- Building a Community Focused Code Enforcement Program
- Changing Public Perception
- Hiring the Right Employees



Field Spotlight: Peoria, Illinois

Peoria's "code encouragement" approach emphasizes relationship-building, positive reinforcement, and community education around addressing common violations. Their focus on hiring inspectors with strong public service values—rather than just meeting the technical job requirements—has led to higher compliance rates and greater trust among residents. The code enforcement department provides annual trainings led by the City's Chief Diversity Officer. They also engage an external consultant to provide customer service training every two years for their entire team.

Ensuring officers are community-minded is a foundational component of their hiring process. Peoria leaders are far more concerned with finding inspectors that demonstrate a commitment to public service rather than those who simply meet the technical job requirements.

Additional Resources

- [Webinar: Strengthening Community Relationships to Achieve Equitable Code Enforcement](#), Community Progress and Peoria
- [Webinar: Advancing Equity in Enforcement](#), SCEMA
- [Reimagining Code Enforcement and Equity](#), Hester Street Report
- [The Power & Proximity of Code Enforcement](#), Hester Street Report

Implementation Steps

Short Term

1. Identify in-house City staff (e.g., Department of Public Health's Division of Health Equity and Social Justice) who could provide trainings.
2. Conduct a scan of local partners and develop budgets to engage third-party trainers over a three-year period.

Long Term

1. Use third-party experts to provide training.
2. Establish an annual training budget for skills development. Training budgets could consist of group trainings based on skills gaps identified by leadership, and budgets for inspectors to choose up to one individualized training every two years from a list of approved topics and providers.

