

**LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**NAVIGATING TOUGH  
TALKS: DIFFICULT  
CONVERSATIONS IN  
MUNICIPAL WORKPLACES**

June 2025



Pennsylvania  
Department of Transportation

# SESSION BEING RECORDED

This session is being recorded.

By participating in this session, you are consenting to the recording, retention, and use of this session.

Additionally, as a reminder by asking a question verbally you are also consenting to the recording, retention, and use of your statements.

# PRESENTERS

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Presenter: Kristy Shinn, MS, CIT  
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# VIRTUAL IN-SESSION ATTENDEE GUIDE

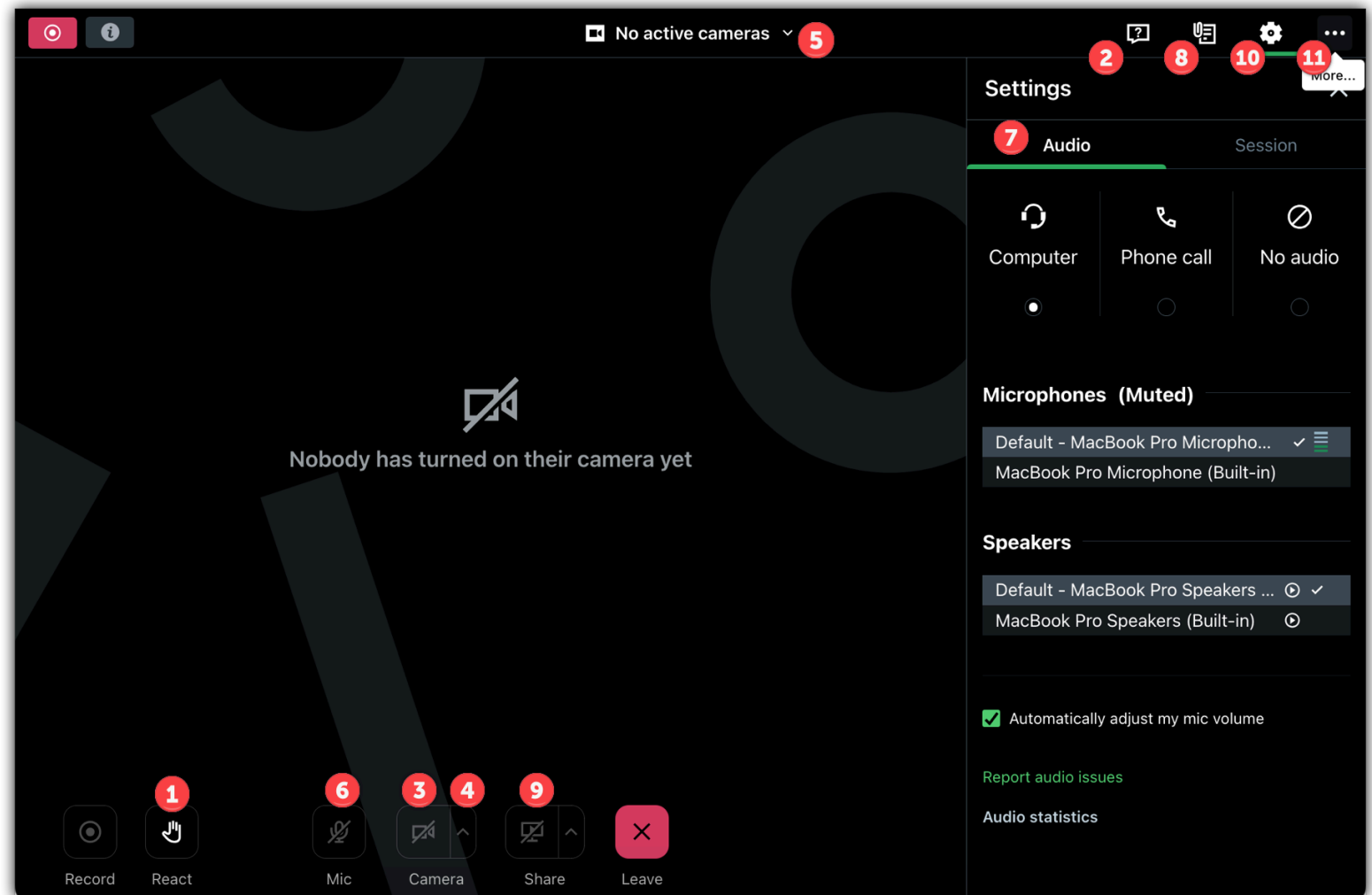
## Interact with the presenter/organizer:

(1) Use the Hand icon to raise your hand.

(2) Use the Question icon to type your question/comment and send it to the staff.

(7) To change your audio mode (if available) or audio device, select Settings > Audio.

(8) If materials have been shared such as handouts or PDF slides, you can access them through the Materials icon.







# HANDOUTS ONLINE

- <https://gis.penndot.pa.gov/ltap/> - Training Descriptions
- Click on the course description and scroll to the bottom to download handouts.

Handout Upload:  No file chosen

Course Handouts :

#	File Name	Date	Download	Delete
1	00.ClassWorkbook_2021-01-13.pdf	1/13/2021 10:23:00 AM		
2	01. Handout_ 1.pdf	1/13/2021 10:23:00 AM		

## Pennsylvania Local Technical Assistance Program

### Providing:

#### Training

- In-Person & Virtual
- Road Shows

#### Technical Support Services

- Onsite
- Phone/email

- Website: [www.gis.penndot.pa.gov/ltap](http://www.gis.penndot.pa.gov/ltap)

All Services  
are FREE.

The screenshot shows the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) website. The header includes the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation logo and the program name. A navigation bar contains links for Home, LTAP Tools, My Tools, Administrative Tools, Reports, Help, and Sign out. The main content area features six green buttons: 'My Training Schedule' (Upcoming training, completed training and completion certificates), 'My Technical Assistance Requests' (Information on your current and past tech assist requests), 'My User Data and Roads Scholar Status' (Update your user information, view Roads Scholar status, and print certificates), 'Register for Training' (Classes, Drop-Ins, Webinars and Workshops), 'Request Technical Assistance' (Have a technical expert evaluate your transportation issue and provide potential solutions), and 'Resources and Technical Information' (Resources to assist with safety and maintenance topics). Below these buttons is the text 'All services are free to municipalities'. A section titled 'LTAP Programs' includes links for 'About LTAP', 'Roads Scholar Program', 'LTAP Resources', 'Training Descriptions', and 'Why do I need an Account?'. A yellow arrow points to the 'About LTAP' link. On the right side, there is a photo of a road construction scene and a logo for 'BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP INNOVATION CHALLENGE'. Below that, a section titled 'Upcoming Training' lists a session: 'TRAFFIC SIGNALS BASICS (RS2-S33-D1) VIRTUAL, PA' on '30 JAN' at '08:00 AM'.

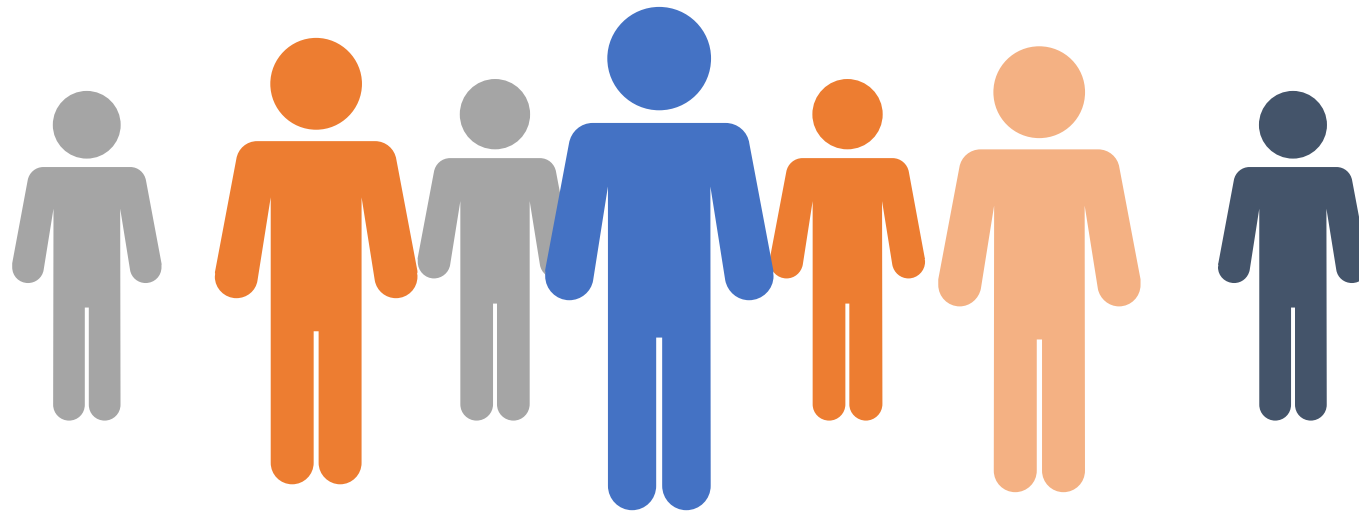
# INTRODUCTION



Effective communication is key in public-facing roles.



Difficult conversations are inevitable with colleagues, leadership, or the community.



# POLL QUESTION

How comfortable are you with handling difficult conversations?

- a) Very comfortable
- b) Somewhat comfortable
- c) Somewhat uncomfortable
- d) Very uncomfortable



# FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



## ACTIVE LISTENING



### ACTIVE LISTENING

- Give full attention to the speaker without interrupting.
- Paraphrase and summarize to confirm understanding.
- Use verbal affirmations like "I understand" or "That makes sense."



## VERBAL COMMUNICATION



### VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Be clear and concise in your messaging.
- Use a calm and measured tone, even in tense situations.
- Avoid jargon or overly complex language; keep it accessible.

# FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



## NON-VERBAL CUES



## NON-VERBAL CUES

- Maintain open body language (uncrossed arms, nodding).
- Make appropriate eye contact to convey engagement.
- Be aware of facial expressions and how they may be perceived.

## EMPATHY & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



## EMPATHY & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

- Acknowledge the emotions of others and validate their concerns.
- Manage your own emotions to prevent escalation.
- Adapt your communication style based on the emotional state of the other person.

# POLL QUESTION

What is the most challenging aspect of difficult conversations for you?

- a) Managing emotions
- b) Choosing the right words
- c) Handling resistance
- d) Staying professional under pressure
- e) Finding a solution

# IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Conflict/disagreement with colleagues**

## **Example:**

A team member consistently misses deadlines, affecting your work. You need to address the issue without damaging the working relationship.

**What would you do?**

# IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Concerns with leaders at your organization**

## **Example:**

You feel overburdened with responsibilities but are unsure how to express concerns to your manager without appearing unwilling to take on work.

**What would you do?**

# IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Managing difficult community interactions (part 1)**

## **Example:**

A frustrated member of the community is complaining on-site while you are working on a project.

**What would you do?**

# IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Managing difficult community interactions (part 2)**

## **Example:**

A frustrated member of the community is raising their voice during the public comment portion of a community meeting. They are demanding action.

**What would you do?**

# IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Emotional triggers and personal biases**

## **Example:**

A member of the public approaches you while you are working on a project and makes a politically-charged comment about the project. They are expecting you to agree with them and get upset when you don't engage.

**What would you do?**



# POLL QUESTION

What type of difficult conversations do you encounter most often?

- a) Conflicts with colleagues
- b) Concerns with leadership
- c) Difficult conversations with the community
- d) Emotional triggers/personal bias

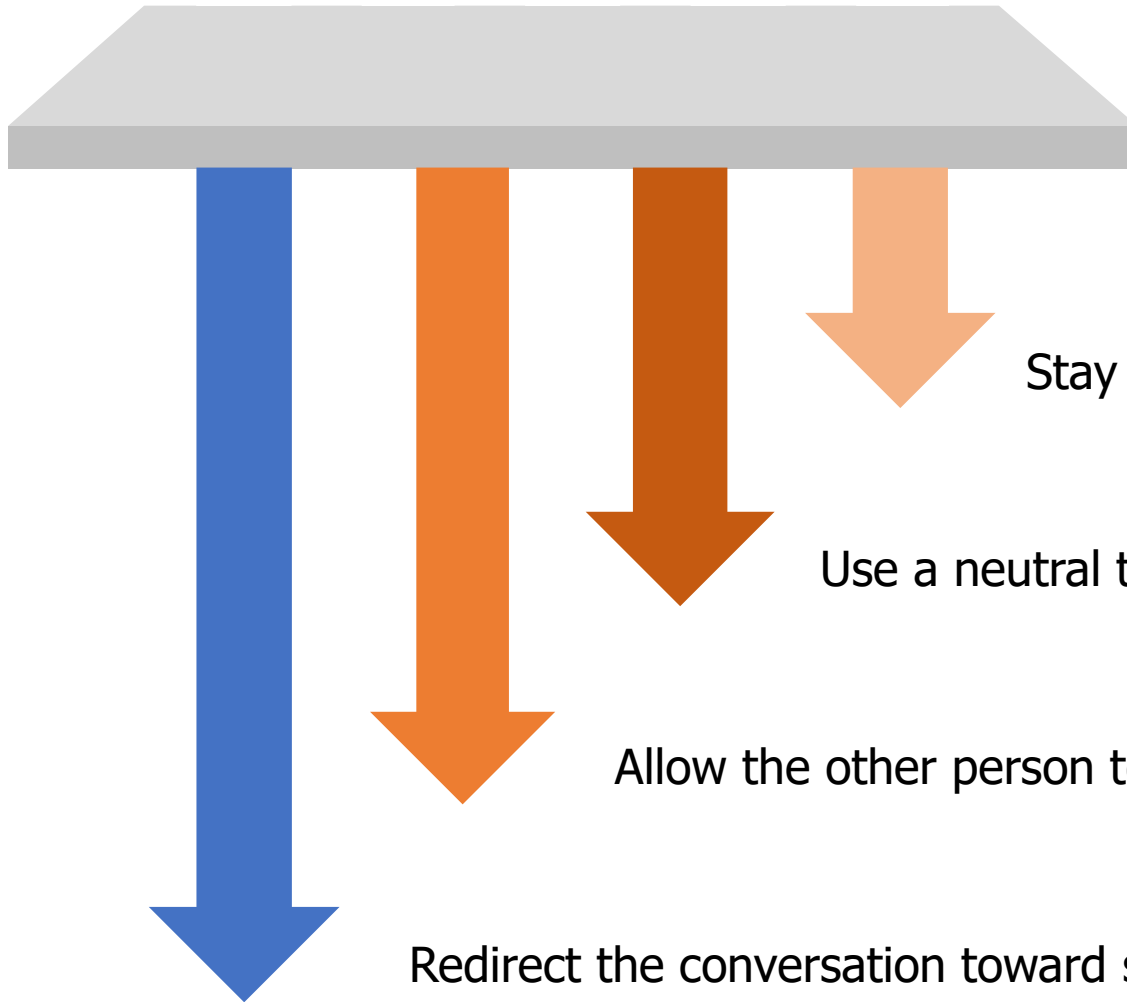
# DIFFICULT CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

## PREP Framework



# DIFFICULT CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

## De-escalation Techniques



Stay calm and avoid reacting emotionally.

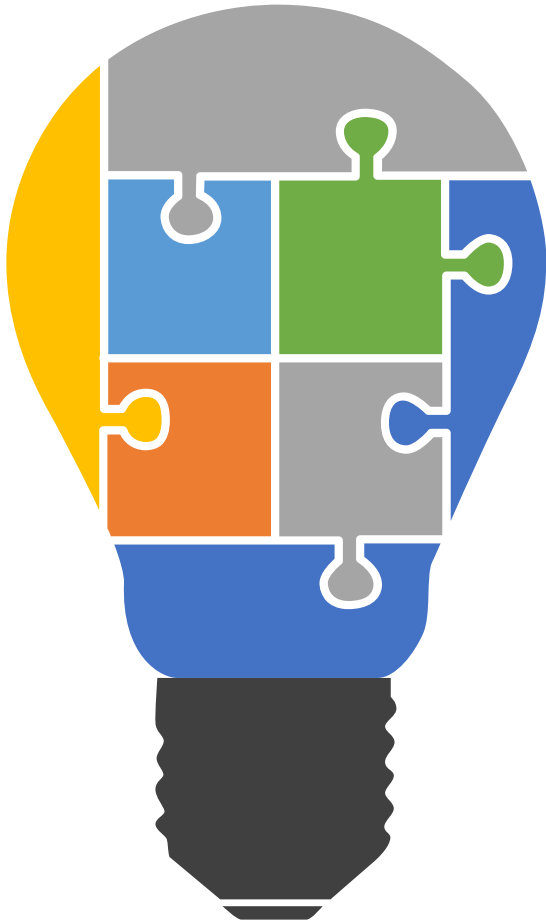
Use a neutral tone and open body language.

Allow the other person to express themselves before responding.

Redirect the conversation toward solutions instead of conflict.

# DIFFICULT CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

## Handling Resistance and Pushback



Stay patient and acknowledge concerns.

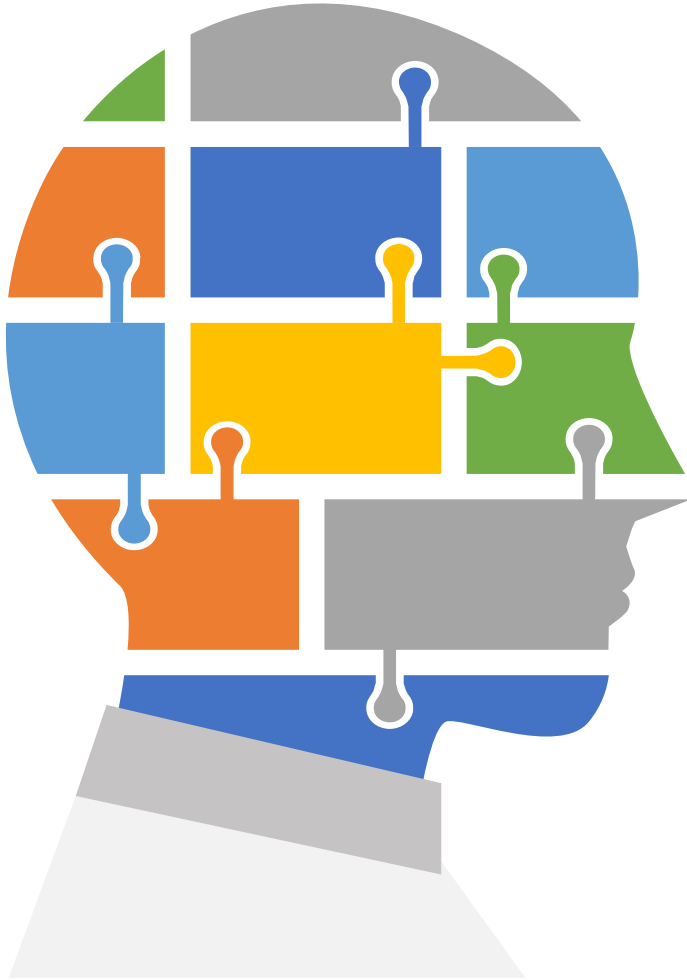
Use bridging statements such as "I see your point, and..." rather than "but."

Offer alternatives and seek common ground.

Keep the conversation professional and fact-based.

# DIFFICULT CONVERSATION STRATEGIES

## Framing Conversations for Positive Outcomes



Focus on shared goals and mutual interests.

Reframe the issue as an opportunity for collaboration and improvement.

Use "I" statements to express concerns without sounding accusatory.

Summarize key points and agree on next steps.

# REVISITING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Conflict/disagreement with colleagues**

## **Example:**

A team member consistently misses deadlines, affecting your work. You need to address the issue without damaging the working relationship.

**What would you do?** Use active listening and problem solving. Focus on shared goals and mutual interests.

# REVISITING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Concerns with leaders at your organization**

## **Example:**

You feel overburdened with responsibilities but are unsure how to express concerns to your manager without appearing unwilling to take on work.

**What would you do?** Use I statements and focus on solutions. Summarize key points and agree on next steps.

# REVISITING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Managing difficult community interactions (part 1)**

## **Example:**

A frustrated member of the community is complaining on-site while you are working on a project.

**What would you do?** Allow the other person to express themselves before responding. Use empathy, patience, and clear communication to navigate the interaction.



# REVISITING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Managing difficult community interactions (part 2)**

## **Example:**

A frustrated member of the community is raising their voice during the public comment portion of a community meeting. They are demanding action.

**What would you do?** Stay calm and avoid reacting emotionally. Keep the conversation professional and fact-based.

# REVISITING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

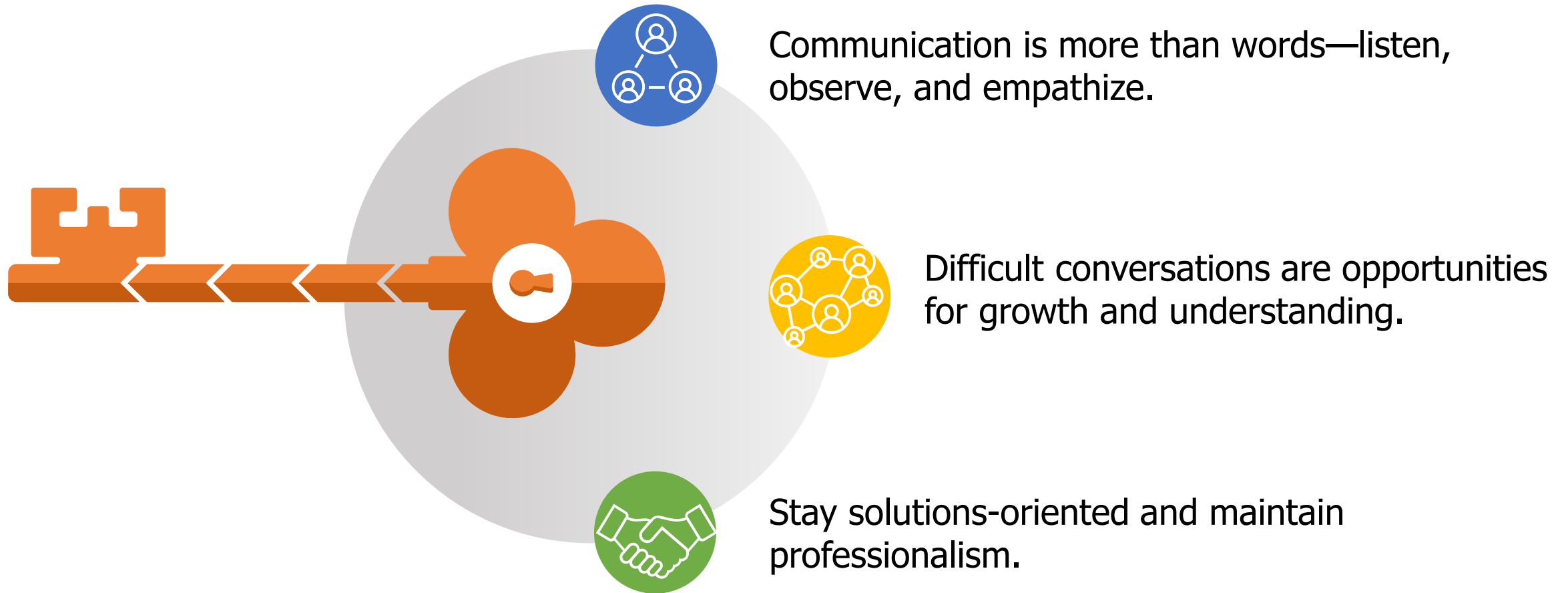
- **Emotional triggers and personal biases**

## **Example:**

A member of the public approaches you while you are working on a project and makes a politically-charged comment about the project. They are expecting you to agree with them and get upset when you don't engage.

**What would you do?** Stay calm and avoid reacting emotionally. Redirect the conversation toward solutions instead of conflict.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS



# RESOURCES

- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* – Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler
- *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* – Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen
- *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* – Marshall B. Rosenberg
- <https://www.mindtools.com/ayi4n53/working-in-a-public-facing-role>

# CONTACT LTAP

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Pennsylvania

**Department of Transportation**

Local Technical Assistance Program

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