Negotiation and Leverage Workshop Recap

Stronger Roots workshop – September 23, 2026 – Bratislava – Flóra Szigeti

Thank you for today's discussion! If, at the end of the workshop, you had an idea or conclusion that you wanted to share with the whole group, please put it in the conference evaluation form, indicating that is something you would have shared with the group at the end of the session, if we had some more time left. That gives you another chance to share it with everyone.

Our central question was how to improve a negotiating position when formal power is unequal:

- Whereas power-inequality is a given,
- leverage is issue-specific - it can be built over time, made visible in conversation, and strengthened through the way a negotiation is organized

The three layers of leverage

We distinguished

A) positive leverage, which gives the other side a reason to work with you, from
B) negative leverage, which gives you a credible option if you do not reach agreement.

We also distinguished

- actual leverage from
- its perception:

  What you possess matters, and so does whether your counterpart understands its value.

We applied these ideas at three levels: preparation, communication and negotiation structure.

1 – Prepare your actual leverage

Sources of leverage:

- Resources include time, money and people
- Information can clarify both parties' constraints or supply specialist knowledge the counterpart needs.
- Relationships include trust, reputation, coalitions and access to people others struggle to reach.
- Alternatives include another partner or a feasible way to pursue the work independently. -> What is your best alternative to the negotiated agreement? A.k.a. BATNA

A BATNA is the best feasible path outside this deal <-> the best achievable agreement is the strongest feasible package inside this deal.

Compare a proposal with your BATNA to decide if you can accept.

2 – Communicate your leverage

At the table, help the other side recognize what you can offer and understand what matters to them:

- Active listening attends to substance and concerns;
- mirroring repeats a key phrase to invite elaboration;
- labeling names a possible concern without asserting it as fact;
- paraphrasing checks your understanding;
- silence gives space for a response or applies pressure;
- anchoring offers a concrete initial reference point for further negotiation.

Choose a tool deliberately and practise it in a real conversation!

3 – Use the structure of the negotiation

a) An opening statement can establish your purpose, identity and mandate.
b) Agenda setting determines which issues are discussed and in what order.
c) In the main exchange, test, gain and offer information and develop proposals.
d) A caucus or pause allows internal consultation or a change in the room's dynamics.

These are useful elements to PREPARE, not a compulsory sequence for every meeting. Although they might give you an upper hand in some parts of the world, structuring meetings has no tradition.

The cases shared in the room:

- A CSO negotiating with a municipality recalled commitments the municipality had already made publicly. Bringing those commitments as leverage into the opening gave the CSO a stronger basis for its request (also note: 'anchoring').
- In work concerning asylum seekers at a border, a colleague's informal contact with a border officer helped a CSO anticipate a response and test possibilities before acting. That relationship was leverage.
- A network and another CSO had scheduled similar conferences in the same city. The network wanted to discuss only the immediate scheduling conflict; the other CSO wanted to address earlier disputes too. The other CSO's media relationships (leverage!) reduced its dependence on a joint solution. We cannot know whether a broader agenda would have produced an agreement, but the choice of agenda affected what could be negotiated.
- In a board discussion about a president's resignation, the president visibly paused to consult a lawyer. Whether or not that call took place, the pause altered the atmosphere, creating leverage. An actual caucus can likewise let a team consult, reassess its options and interrupt a difficult dynamic. Its effect will depend on the context and on how the other side responds.

A short preparation routine for your next negotiation

If you have only a few minutes, write down answers to these four questions:

1. What is our BATNA, what must we verify or strengthen about it, and what is the minimum agreement we would accept?
2. Which resources, information or relationships make us valuable to this counterpart?
3. Which one communication tool will I deliberately practise at the table?
4. Would a specific opening frame, agenda order, sequence of information or planned caucus improve our position?