

A Checklist for the Consensus Process

These are just some of the many ways to conduct a meeting using the consensus process.

Why Consensus

- It is open, participatory, democratic
- Values the group, trust, cooperation, good will
- Dynamic and creative process
- Forces responsibility for disruption

Consensus is a process for adopting proposals. People who disagree are responsible for voicing their concerns. No decision is made until concerns are heard and discussed. Any concerns that remain after discussion are acknowledged. The group may go ahead with a consensus decision without complete agreement.

Basic Procedure

Before the meeting (or at previous meeting):

- Choose facilitator(s)
- Gather agenda items
- Determine presenter/initiator for each item
- Determine item type: announcement, report, discussion, decision
- Bring materials/supplies needed

At the meeting:

- Connect (game, song, ritual, etc.)
- Check-in/excitement-sharing
- Agenda review: agree on order and time
- Choose notetaker, timekeeper, vibeswatcher
- Step through the agenda (big or little first?)
- Take breaks
- Announcements
- Set next meeting
- Evaluation (good, bad, better)
- Closing (game, song, ritual, etc.)

The Flow of a Cooperative Decision-Making Process

Background

- What are we talking about? .Issue raised- what is the problem?
- Clarify problem — put it in context

Discuss, bring out a diversity of ideas, concerns, and perspectives — look at possible solutions and the problems with those solutions

Develop Proposal /Proposal Made

- Clarifying Questions
- Concerns
- Discussion / Friendly Amendments
- Re-state Proposal

Test for Consensus

- Strong concerns /objections
- Stand Asides
- Blocks
- Consensus

- Establish how the decision will be implemented
- Make sure there are no loose ends
- Restate the decision for the notetaker (including implementation)

Roles

Facilitator

- Helps formulate agenda
- Helps establish a hopeful, upbeat, and safe atmosphere
- Helps group work through decisions:
 - Calls on Speakers
 - Asks for clarification
 - Summarizes, sorts, focuses discussion — lists threads of thought, agreements, and disagreements
 - Helps prioritize and order discussion topics
 - Brings out all viewpoints
 - Looks for underlying agreements
 - Synthesizes differences
 - Restates Proposal, Limits proposals on floor
 - Formalizes Decisions
- Encourages equal participation
 - Draws out quiet people
 - Limits Talkers
- Uses Facilitation Tools
- Stays neutral while facilitating

Co-Facilitator

- Backup to the facilitator
- Takes stack
- May serve as vibes watcher

Scribe

- Records the exact proposal language.
- Notes anyone standing aside.

Vibeswatcher

- Watches the **process** of the meeting
- Notices underlying feelings from tone of voice and body language, points out tension and weariness, recommends changes
- Stops bad process (domineering, guilt-tripping, interrupting, put-downs, bulldozing, defensiveness, space-outs, etc.)
- Helps resolve conflicts
- Helps work out negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, hopelessness)
- Suggests tools to improve meetings
- Helps create a safe, accepting tone
- Deals with outside distractions

Time Keeper

- Keeps track of time

Guidelines for Sharing

Speaker

- Balance in time
- “I” statements
- No put downs or minimizers
- No piggy-backing

The Listener

- No cross-talk or interruptions
- No advice
- Confidentiality
- Amnesty

The Connection

- Twinkling

When Consensus Works

- Power and basic values are shared.
- Cohesiveness of the group is as important as the outcome.
- A range of good options is available.
- The group is willing to learn and practice group skills.

When It Doesn't Work

- The group has no training in consensus.
- One person or group holds, is or perceived to hold, most of the power.
- One or more individuals consistently place their personal agendas in front of the group agenda.
- There are no good options:
- Timing is urgent.
- The issue is trivial.
- The group has insufficient information.
- Participants don't have energy for the process.

Tools for Stress-Reduction/Conflict Resolution

- Stretch breaks/cooperative games
- Singing
- Humor
- Affirmations
- Feelings sharing
- Silence (mediation, prayer)
- Calm voice
- Making LOUD noises
- Eye contact
- Breathing (deep)
- Back rubs
- Fears in the hat
- Appreciations/affirmations
- Active listening
- I-messages
- Restating other's viewpoint / modeling opposite views
- Support groups / Caucuses
- Venting emotions somewhere else
- Gripe sessions – share feelings
- Resentment sharing
- Fishbowls
- Spectrums
- Expulsion – based on agreements, questions

Tools for Successful Meetings

- Brainstorms, Popcorn (no order, just popping in)
- Go around the circle, rounds
- Stacking (count off - limit to 3-5),
- Small-group discussion, dyads, tryads
- Advantages/disadvantages chart
- Straw Polls – sense of group
- Visual aids, Visible notes
- Criteria Process
- Goals'/priorities-setting techniques, dots
- Challenges/devil's advocate questions
- Participation equalizers (pebbles, etc.)
- Active listening in pairs
- Support groups/caucuses, Feelings sharing
- Fishbowls, Role plays
- Evaluations, Food