

## RESOURCE PAGES

### *Proposal Based Decision-making: The Rule of Thumb*

<b>Consensus</b> is	finding a proposal acceptable enough that everyone can support it and no one opposes it
<b>Consensus</b> is not	a unanimous vote, a majority vote, or everyone totally in agreement
<b>Consensus</b> is	one among many different ways to manage relationships, reach decisions, and take action to achieve results.

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#### Step 1. Proposal Development

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Proposals are made by some one saying: I propose that \_\_\_\_\_.

*Example: I propose that we invite the PTA president to our next meeting.*

After a proposal is made people can either build on the proposal or make another proposal. (They can not just criticize the proposal!)

*Example of building on a proposal: I would like to build on your proposal by proposing that we also invite the Principal.*

*Example of making another proposal: I propose that we use our next meeting to decide what we want from the school before inviting anyone.*

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#### Step 2: Finding the decision “everyone can go along with”

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People have an opportunity to discuss and explore the proposal. When people understand the proposal use thumbs to see who can support the proposal. Scan the room to see the level of support for the proposal.

TIP: Go to the people with thumbs sideways (not sure) or down (disagree) and ask: *What can bring you up?* This gives them an opportunity to say what it would take for them to go along with the proposal.

If they aren't sure what will help them, have the group ask questions to better understand their concern and be creative about finding ways to address those concerns. This may involve creating another proposal. People ask question to better understand these concerns and try to constructively address them. (Inquiry) People do not make speeches saying why the proposal is good. (Advocacy)

*A quick, visual check on consensus can be made by asking for people's opinions in a quick poll*



*Agree (thumbs up)*



*Not sure (thumbs sideways)*



*Disagree (thumbs down)*

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#### Step 3. Making the decision

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The decision is made when either every one's “thumb is up” (Consensus) or the group has decided that they have enough support (almost everyone's thumb is up).

\* Courtesy of Sherbrooke Consulting, Inc.

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*Consensus decision making — A process of finding a solution that members can support, even if some members are not in full agreement.*

### Making Decisions by Consensus

Consensus means finding a proposal or solution that everyone in the group can support, even though some members may not be in agreement. The assumption for consensus is that individuals will leave their personal issues “at the door” and consider instead the good of the organization. Each person doesn’t have to agree completely with the decision in order to support it.

Consensus is *not* a unanimous vote. Consensus is reached when each person can at least say, “*This is not exactly what I want; however, I can live with the decision and support it.*”

#### WHY IS CONSENSUS DECISIONMAKING IMPORTANT?

Consensus decisionmaking is more than a technique for reaching decisions. Consensus decisionmaking is important because it embodies the values of collaboration, shared responsibility, and accountability for better results. Consider the following about consensus decisionmaking:

- ★ All viewpoints are heard in the process of reaching decisions; thereby increasing the group understanding of the range of community’s interests.
- ★ Unity and strong support for decisions about the well-being of children and families undergird the process as well as how resources are used to improve conditions.
- ★ Consensus strengthens the decisionmaking process. It creates a sense of individual responsibility for the group’s actions and, at the same time, increases individuals’ participation in the decisionmaking process.

Consensus decisionmaking does *not* imply that the group thinks alike on all matters. Consensus decisionmaking does not shy away from conflict. On the contrary, conflict is considered healthy. Exploring diverse viewpoints brings the strengths and weaknesses of proposals into focus and uncovers underlying attitudes and assumptions.

#### Keep in Mind...

Consensus is built upon principles such as respect, unity of purpose, nonviolence, self-empowerment, commitment, and active participation.

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\* Courtesy of Center for the Study of Social Policy

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### What are characteristics of consensus decisionmaking?

- ★ An atmosphere of inquiry.
- ★ A focus *away from* an individual who is advocating personal views.
- ★ The meeting's purpose and results as the criteria for measuring ideas and actions.
- ★ Airing of differing views so that they can be addressed.
- ★ An environment that promotes trust, respect, and unity of purpose.

### Keep in Mind...

If the group cannot reach consensus, it may have the "wrong" issue on the table. The group should go back and re-examine the issue.

### Changing to Consensus Decisionmaking

One collaborative in Georgia typically used majority rule. As members recognized that the collaborative was stuck in "the usual" way of conducting business, they began exploring consensus decisionmaking methods.

The collaborative did *not* go from using majority rule one day to using consensus decisionmaking the next. Instead, members requested and received an orientation to consensus decisionmaking. They outlined what this new decisionmaking process would look like and the steps the collaborative would take to implement it. This process took several months.

Now the collaborative seldom takes votes. Several members have commented on how energized the group is as a whole and that individual members are more vocal and involved at meetings. Other members mentioned that their sense of being vested in the work has increased, and the chairperson remarked that a broader representation of members is now more actively involved.

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### Consensus Decisionmaking: The Process

A consensus approach to decisionmaking is a format that reflects the best interests, needs, and desires of the entire group. Michigan's LCFCC adopted a consensus decisionmaking process for its work. The underlying premise was that agreement existed among members on the common intent of the group—its mission, values, principles, bylaws, traditions, and the results to effect.

The process starts with agenda planning that sorts out issues and puts together proposals that advance the organization's purpose. The proposals are brought to the larger group as agenda items for the meeting. Once a proposal reaches the floor, the facilitator asks for any clarifying questions. (Only questions that further the understanding of the proposal are submitted.) Then discussion begins on three levels:

- (4) Level One—Open discussion and a call for consensus. The facilitator asks if any concerns or objections to the proposal exist. If none, the proposal passes. If not, the process moves to Level Two.
- (5) Level Two—Discussion focuses on identifying concerns by asking and answering the following questions: How does this proposal conflict with our mission statement? How does this proposal support our mission statement? Comments are short and to the point without rebuttal from others, e.g., *I think this proposal conflicts with our mission by....* The Scribe records responses, pros and cons, for all to see.
- (6) Level Three—Discussion is intended to resolve those concerns. Members with concerns may state what it would take for them to agree with the proposal. At this point, a new or revised proposal may emerge. The facilitator then asks for consensus or concerns.

If consensus cannot be reached, closing options include:

- ★ The concerned individual standing aside, if the proposal obviously aligns with the mission and the greater good of the organization;
- ★ Sending the proposal back to the committee for further study;
- ★ Declaring a block.

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\* Courtesy of Center for the Study of Social Policy