

A GUIDE FOR BUILDING CONSENSUS

Using consensus to make decisions can be one of the more challenging forms of decision-making to do well. Here is a guide for helping you use consensus as a decision-making process.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Differences of opinion should be encouraged in early stages of discussion.
- The facilitator should assume that silence means disagreement, not agreement.
- Everyone must feel they have been heard.
- The group should make a reasonable effort to address every concern raised about the proposal under consideration.
- As a minimum, each person must be able to tolerate the decision that is made.
- Everyone must agree to support the decision once it is made

REACHING CONSENSUS

The following are examples of how a formal or informal consensus process might proceed after discussion about issues and proposals:

Informal consensus

- The facilitator asks if anyone has further concerns with the proposal at hand.
- They then look at each person and provide time to respond.
- The facilitator declares that a consensus has been reached if no further concerns are raised.

Formal consensus

- The facilitator asks if anyone has further significant concerns that must be addressed in order for them to support the proposal.
- They then ask each person to verbally respond with one of the following four options:
 1. "Yes."
 2. "Yes, and..." ("I wish that, or I'd like to add that").
 3. "Yes, but..." ("I have significant concerns to be recorded in the minutes. However, I am prepared to support the decision").
 4. "No."

If Someone Is Blocking Consensus

- Ensure that their reason for blocking is clearly understood by everyone.
- Ensure that the person blocking has participated fully in the whole session.
- Ask the person blocking to offer an alternative or compromise.
- Break the proposal into sections, and reach consensus on one issue at a time.
- Sleep on it and revisit the issue at a later date.