

# Digital Commons Governance Toolkit

## SMS Voting Templates, Consensus-Building Guides, and Decision-Making Protocols

Version 1.0 (2025-05-22)

### Part 1: SMS Voting System

#### Why SMS Voting Works

- **Universal Access:** Works on any mobile phone, no internet required
- **Privacy Protection:** Anonymous voting with transparent results
- **Cultural Inclusion:** Accommodates oral traditions and diverse literacy levels
- **Crisis Resilience:** Functions during infrastructure disruptions

#### SMS Voting Setup Guide

##### Technical Requirements:

- Basic SMS gateway service (Twilio, TextMagic, or regional equivalent)
- Simple voting platform (can use Google Forms + SMS integration)
- Community device for managing system (tablet or basic computer)
- Solar charger for off-grid communities

##### Step 1: Community Preparation (Week 1)

1. **Community Education:** Explain SMS voting benefits and process
2. **Phone Number Collection:** Gather mobile numbers with explicit consent
3. **Test Group Formation:** Start with 10-15 community members
4. **Privacy Protocols:** Establish rules for anonymous voting and result sharing

##### Step 2: Technical Setup (Week 2)

1. **SMS Service Account:** Create account with regional SMS provider
2. **Voting Platform:** Set up simple voting system with SMS integration
3. **Phone Number Import:** Upload community member contact list
4. **Test Messages:** Send practice messages to verify system function

##### Step 3: First Vote Deployment (Week 3)

1. **Simple Question:** Start with low-stakes community decision
2. **Clear Instructions:** Send voting instructions in local language
3. **Voting Period:** Allow 3-7 days for community response
4. **Result Sharing:** Announce results at community meeting

#### SMS Voting Templates

##### Template 1: Simple Yes/No Decision

SMS: "Community Vote: Should we install solar panels at community center? Reply YES or NO"

Response Options: YES, NO, ABSTAIN

##### Template 2: Multiple Choice Selection

SMS: "Choose priority for next month: A) Digital security workshop B) Community garden  
Response Options: A, B, C, ABSTAIN

### Template 3: Budget Priority Ranking

SMS: "Rank our top 3 technology priorities (1=highest): Internet access, Digital literacy  
Response Format: Free text with number ranking

### Template 4: Policy Development Input

SMS: "Community Data Policy Draft available at meeting Sunday. Key question: Should I  
Response Options: SHARE, NO-SHARE, DISCUSS

## SMS Voting Best Practices

### Question Design:

- **Clear and Simple:** One concept per vote
- **Culturally Appropriate:** Respect local communication styles
- **Action-Oriented:** Focus on decisions requiring community action
- **Timeline Specific:** Include clear voting deadlines

### Participation Enhancement:

- **Multiple Languages:** Send messages in local languages
- **Voice Messages:** Include audio options for low-literacy communities
- **Family Voting:** Allow household representatives where culturally appropriate
- **Meeting Integration:** Always discuss results at community assemblies

### Privacy and Security:

- **Anonymous Voting:** Never link votes to individual phone numbers
- **Secure Storage:** Protect community member contact information
- **Transparent Results:** Share aggregate results without individual identification
- **Community Consent:** Only use SMS voting for decisions community approves

## Part 2: Consensus-Building Protocols

### Modified Consensus for Digital Commons

**Core Principle:** Decisions everyone can live with, even if not everyone's first choice

### Consensus Levels:

1. **Full Support:** "I enthusiastically support this decision"
2. **Support with Concerns:** "I support this but have some concerns we should address"
3. **Stand Aside:** "I don't support this but won't block the group"
4. **Block:** "I cannot support this and believe it harms our community"

## Five-Step Consensus Process

### Step 1: Issue Presentation (15 minutes)

- **Clear Problem Statement:** What decision needs to be made?
- **Background Information:** Context and relevant facts
- **Initial Proposals:** Starting ideas for consideration
- **Timeline Clarification:** When does decision need to be made?

### Step 2: Clarifying Questions (10 minutes)

- **Information Gathering:** Questions about facts and proposals
- **Understanding Check:** Ensure everyone understands the issue
- **No Advocacy:** Save opinions and arguments for later
- **Equal Participation:** Encourage questions from all community members

### Step 3: Discussion and Ideas (30 minutes)

- **Round-Robin Sharing:** Everyone shares thoughts if they want
- **Idea Building:** Build on others' suggestions constructively
- **Concern Expression:** Share worries and potential problems
- **Creative Solutions:** Explore innovative approaches

### Step 4: Proposal Development (20 minutes)

- **Synthesis:** Combine ideas into concrete proposals
- **Amendment Process:** Refine proposals based on discussion
- **Alternative Options:** Develop 2-3 viable choices
- **Impact Assessment:** Consider consequences of each option

### Step 5: Consensus Testing (15 minutes)

- **Formal Consensus Check:** Ask for consensus levels on each proposal
- **Address Concerns:** Work through "support with concerns" issues
- **Block Discussion:** If anyone blocks, understand their concerns
- **Final Decision:** Confirm final agreement and next steps

## Consensus-Building Templates

### Template 1: Community Meeting Agenda

#### COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY AGENDA

Date: [Date] | Time: [Time] | Location: [Location]

1. Welcome and Introductions (10 min)
2. Previous Meeting Follow-up (15 min)
3. Community Updates (20 min)
4. Main Decision Item: [Topic] (90 min)
  - Issue Presentation
  - Clarifying Questions
  - Discussion and Ideas
  - Proposal Development
  - Consensus Testing
5. Announcements and Next Steps (10 min)
6. Closing Circle (5 min)

Facilitator: [Name] | Note-taker: [Name]  
Accessibility: [Interpretation, childcare, etc.]

## Template 2: Proposal Development Worksheet

### PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHEET

Issue: [Clear statement of decision needed]

Background:

- Why is this decision needed?
- What information do we have?
- Who is affected by this decision?

Proposed Solution:

- What specifically are we proposing to do?
- Who will be responsible for implementation?
- What resources are needed?
- What is the timeline?

Benefits:

- How will this help our community?
- Who will benefit most?
- What positive outcomes do we expect?

Concerns and Mitigation:

- What could go wrong?
- Who might be negatively affected?
- How can we address these concerns?

Implementation Plan:

- First steps: [Specific actions]
- Responsible people: [Names and roles]
- Timeline: [Dates and milestones]
- Check-in process: [How we'll monitor progress]

## Template 3: Consensus Level Check

### CONSENSUS LEVEL CHECK

Proposal: [Brief description]

Please indicate your level of support:

- ☐ Full Support: I enthusiastically support this decision
- ☐ Support with Concerns: I support this but have concerns [please explain]
- ☐ Stand Aside: I don't support this but won't block the group [please explain]
- ☐ Block: I cannot support this and believe it harms our community [please explain]

If you have concerns or blocks, what changes would address your issues?  
[Space for written response]

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## Cultural Adaptation Guidelines

### Indigenous and Traditional Governance Integration:

- **Elder Authority:** Incorporate traditional elder leadership roles
- **Sacred Time:** Respect ceremonial calendars and spiritual practices
- **Traditional Consensus:** Adapt existing community decision-making processes
- **Language Protocols:** Use traditional languages for important decisions

### Diverse Communication Styles:

- **High-Context Cultures:** Allow time for indirect communication and relationship building
- **Storytelling Traditions:** Include narrative and story sharing in decision processes
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Pay attention to body language and silence
- **Family/Clan Consultation:** Allow time for consultation with extended family or clan groups

### Accessibility and Inclusion:

- **Multiple Meeting Formats:** Offer both in-person and digital participation options
- **Language Interpretation:** Provide interpretation for linguistic minorities
- **Disability Accommodation:** Ensure physical and communication accessibility
- **Economic Barriers:** Provide childcare, transportation, or meeting stipends when needed

## Part 3: Meeting Facilitation Tools

### Inclusive Facilitation Principles

**Share Power:** Rotate facilitation roles and decision-making authority **Honor Voices:** Create space for everyone to participate meaningfully **Cultural Respect:** Adapt facilitation to community communication traditions **Productive Conflict:** Transform disagreements into opportunities for deeper understanding

### Facilitation Role Responsibilities

#### Pre-Meeting Preparation:

- **Agenda Development:** Create clear agenda with community input
- **Logistics Coordination:** Arrange space, interpretation, childcare, accessibility
- **Material Preparation:** Prepare handouts, voting materials, background information
- **Stakeholder Outreach:** Ensure key community members know about meeting

#### During Meeting Facilitation:

- **Time Management:** Keep discussion focused and on schedule
- **Participation Management:** Encourage quiet voices, manage dominant speakers
- **Process Guidance:** Explain decision-making process clearly
- **Conflict Navigation:** Address tensions constructively

#### Post-Meeting Follow-up:

- **Notes Distribution:** Share meeting summary with community
- **Action Item Tracking:** Follow up on commitments and deadlines

- **Feedback Collection:** Gather input on meeting process and effectiveness
- **Next Meeting Planning:** Schedule and prepare for subsequent meetings

## Meeting Structure Templates

### Template 1: Standard Community Assembly (2 hours)

#### COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY STRUCTURE

##### Opening Circle (15 minutes)

- Welcome and land acknowledgment
- Brief introductions for new participants
- Review agenda and meeting agreements
- Community appreciation and celebrations

##### Community Updates (30 minutes)

- Project progress reports
- Upcoming events and opportunities
- Resource sharing and mutual aid
- External news affecting community

##### Main Decision Items (75 minutes)

- Issue presentation and background
- Clarifying questions and discussion
- Proposal development and refinement
- Consensus building and decision
- Implementation planning

##### Announcements and Coordination (15 minutes)

- Upcoming meetings and events
- Volunteer opportunities and needs
- Resource requests and offers
- Next meeting agenda items

##### Closing Circle (5 minutes)

- Reflections on meeting process
- Appreciation for participation
- Commitment to follow through
- Closing ritual or moment of silence

### Template 2: Emergency Decision Meeting (1 hour)

#### EMERGENCY DECISION PROTOCOL

##### Rapid Response Structure (when urgent decisions needed)

##### Crisis Assessment (10 minutes)

- Clear description of urgent situation
- Timeline and decision deadline
- Who needs to be involved in decision
- What information do we have/need?

**Options Analysis (20 minutes)**

- Possible responses and their consequences
- Resources available for each option
- Community values and priorities
- Risk assessment for each choice

**Modified Consensus (20 minutes)**

- Present 2-3 viable options
- Quick consensus check on each option
- Address major concerns only
- Make decision with available information

**Implementation Planning (10 minutes)**

- Immediate action steps
- Who does what by when
- Communication plan for broader community
- Follow-up and evaluation process

**Template 3: Large Group Assembly (100+ people)****LARGE GROUP ASSEMBLY DESIGN****Managing Big Community Meetings****Small Group Preparation (30 minutes)**

- Break into groups of 8-12 people
- Each group discusses main agenda items
- Groups develop key points and questions
- Select spokesperson for large group report

**Large Group Sharing (45 minutes)**

- Each small group reports key points (3 min each)
- Facilitator identifies common themes
- Address questions requiring whole group input
- Clarify major differences and concerns

**Decision Process (45 minutes)**

- Present synthesized proposals from small groups
- Test for consensus using hand signals
- Address blocks and major concerns
- Confirm final decision and next steps

**Note: Use hand signals for large group communication:**

- Raised fist: Full support
- Flat hand: Have concerns
- Thumbs down: Need more discussion
- Crossed arms: Block (serious concerns)

**Conflict Resolution in Meetings****When Disagreements Arise:**

1. **Acknowledge the Conflict:** "I notice we have different perspectives on this"

2. **Separate People from Issues:** Focus on ideas, not personalities
3. **Seek Understanding:** "Help me understand your concern"
4. **Find Common Ground:** "What do we all agree on?"
5. **Generate Solutions:** "How might we address both concerns?"

#### De-escalation Techniques:

- **Take Breaks:** Allow cooling-off time when tensions rise
- **Reframe Issues:** Focus on shared community values
- **One-on-One Conversations:** Address personal conflicts privately
- **Mediation Support:** Bring in neutral community members to help

#### When to Use Different Approaches:

- **Minor Disagreements:** Address in the moment with good facilitation
- **Major Conflicts:** Schedule separate conflict resolution sessions
- **Personal Issues:** Handle outside formal decision-making meetings
- **Values Conflicts:** May require longer community conversation and education

## Part 4: Crisis Decision-Making Protocols

### Maintaining Democracy During Emergencies

**Core Principle:** Crises require rapid response while preserving community control and democratic accountability

#### Emergency Categories:

- **Natural Disasters:** Floods, storms, earthquakes requiring immediate community response
- **Technical Emergencies:** Cyberattacks, infrastructure failures, system breakdowns
- **Political Crises:** Government restrictions, surveillance threats, community safety issues
- **Health Emergencies:** Disease outbreaks, medical crises, public health threats

### Emergency Governance Structure

#### Emergency Response Team Formation:

- **Pre-Selected Team:** 5-7 community members with rotating leadership
- **Skills Representation:** Include technical, communication, and community organizing skills
- **Cultural Authority:** Include traditional leaders and elder representatives
- **Youth Inclusion:** Meaningful youth representation in emergency response

#### Emergency Decision Authority:

- **24-Hour Decisions:** Emergency team can make immediate decisions
- **72-Hour Review:** All emergency decisions reviewed by broader community within 3 days
- **One-Week Ratification:** Community assembly ratifies or modifies emergency decisions
- **Automatic Sunset:** All emergency powers expire after 30 days unless renewed

### Crisis Communication Protocols

#### Template 1: Emergency Communication Plan

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL



Alert Level: [Low/Medium/High/Critical]  
 Situation: [Brief description of emergency]  
 Immediate Actions Needed: [Specific steps community members should take]

Communication Channels:

- ☐ SMS alerts to all community members
- ☐ Community radio announcements
- ☐ Door-to-door messengers
- ☐ Social media updates
- ☐ Physical bulletin boards

Key Messages:

- What happened?
- Is the community safe?
- What should people do immediately?
- When will we have more information?
- How can people stay connected?

Emergency Team Contacts:

- Coordinator: [Name and contact]
- Technical Support: [Name and contact]
- Community Liaison: [Name and contact]
- External Relations: [Name and contact]

## Template 2: Emergency Decision Documentation

### EMERGENCY DECISION RECORD

Date/Time: [When decision was made]  
 Emergency Team Members Present: [Names]  
 Situation: [Description of crisis requiring decision]

Decision Made:  
 [Specific action or policy decided]

Rationale:

- Why was this decision necessary?
- What alternatives were considered?
- What community values guided this decision?

Implementation:

- Who is responsible for carrying out this decision?
- What resources are needed?
- What is the timeline?

Community Impact:

- Who is affected by this decision?
- How will we monitor implementation?
- When will we review this decision?

Democratic Accountability:

- Date for community review: [Within 72 hours]

- Community assembly ratification date: [Within 1 week]
- Automatic expiration date: [Within 30 days]

## Post-Crisis Evaluation Process

**Community Learning Session** (Within 2 weeks of crisis resolution):

1. **Crisis Response Assessment:** What worked well? What could be improved?
2. **Decision Quality Review:** Were emergency decisions appropriate and effective?
3. **Community Resilience Analysis:** How can we be better prepared for future crises?
4. **Governance Process Update:** What changes to emergency protocols are needed?

## Template 3: Crisis Learning Documentation

### POST-CRISIS COMMUNITY LEARNING SESSION

Crisis Summary: [Brief description of emergency and response]

Response Duration: [How long emergency response lasted]

Community Impact: [How crisis affected community members]

What Worked Well:

- [Specific successes in crisis response]
- [Effective community cooperation examples]
- [Good decisions and quick actions]

Areas for Improvement:

- [Communication challenges or failures]
- [Decision-making difficulties]
- [Resource or capacity gaps]

Community Resilience Lessons:

- [What made our community strong during crisis]
- [How we supported each other effectively]
- [What community resources proved most valuable]

Recommendations for Future:

- [Changes to emergency protocols]
- [Additional skills or resources needed]
- [Governance improvements for crisis situations]

Implementation Plan:

- [Specific changes we will make]
- [Who is responsible for each change]
- [Timeline for implementing improvements]

## Part 5: Cultural Adaptation and Accessibility

### Honoring Diverse Governance Traditions

**Indigenous Governance Integration:**

- **Circle Processes:** Adapt talking circles for digital commons decisions
- **Elder Authority:** Maintain traditional elder leadership while including youth voice

- **Consensus Traditions:** Build on existing Indigenous consensus-building practices
- **Seasonal Governance:** Align decision-making with traditional seasonal cycles

#### **Religious and Spiritual Integration:**

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Include spiritual practices appropriate to community
- **Moral Framework:** Make decisions within community spiritual and ethical values
- **Sacred Time:** Respect religious observances and holy days in meeting scheduling
- **Blessing and Gratitude:** Include appropriate blessing or gratitude practices

#### **Secular and Progressive Traditions:**

- **Parliamentary Procedure:** Adapt formal parliamentary rules for community scale
- **Feminist Process:** Include feminist meeting and decision-making principles
- **Anti-Oppression:** Use anti-racist and anti-oppression frameworks
- **Environmental Justice:** Include environmental impact in all decision-making

### **Language and Communication Accessibility**

#### **Multilingual Meeting Support:**

- **Interpretation Services:** Provide interpretation for minority language speakers
- **Document Translation:** Translate key materials into community languages
- **Bilingual Facilitation:** Use facilitators comfortable in multiple languages
- **Cultural Interpretation:** Explain cultural concepts across different traditions

#### **Literacy and Education Accommodation:**

- **Visual Aids:** Use pictures, diagrams, and visual materials for complex concepts
- **Audio Options:** Record meetings and provide audio summaries
- **Peer Explanation:** Pair community members for mutual support and explanation
- **Simplified Materials:** Create simple-language versions of complex documents

#### **Disability and Accessibility:**

- **Physical Accessibility:** Ensure meeting spaces accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids
- **Sensory Accommodation:** Provide sign language interpretation and hearing assistance
- **Cognitive Support:** Offer note-taking assistance and memory aids
- **Alternative Participation:** Enable participation via phone or video for those who cannot attend in person

### **Economic and Social Inclusion**

#### **Addressing Economic Barriers:**

- **Meeting Timing:** Schedule meetings when working people can attend
- **Childcare Provision:** Provide childcare during meetings when possible
- **Transportation Support:** Offer rides or transit support for isolated community members
- **Food and Refreshments:** Provide food when meetings extend through meal times

#### **Social and Cultural Inclusion:**

- **Safe Space Creation:** Establish ground rules preventing harassment and discrimination
- **Diverse Leadership:** Rotate leadership roles across different demographic groups
- **Cultural Competency:** Train facilitators in cultural sensitivity and anti-oppression
- **Conflict Mediation:** Provide mediation support for cultural or social conflicts

## Part 6: Implementation and Sustainability

### Getting Started with Community Governance

#### Month 1: Foundation Building

- Week 1: Community conversations about governance needs and preferences
- Week 2: Cultural adaptation planning and stakeholder engagement
- Week 3: Decision-making process selection and role assignment
- Week 4: First community assembly using chosen governance approach

#### Month 2: System Refinement

- Gather feedback on initial governance experiences
- Adjust processes based on community input
- Address participation barriers and accessibility issues
- Begin more complex decision-making using refined processes

#### Month 3: Integration and Growth

- Integrate governance with digital commons projects
- Expand participation through community outreach
- Connect with regional networks for peer learning
- Document innovations for sharing with other communities

### Sustaining Democratic Governance

#### Leadership Development:

- **Rotation Systems:** Rotate facilitation and coordination roles regularly
- **Skills Training:** Provide ongoing training in facilitation and conflict resolution
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pair experienced and new community leaders
- **Recognition and Support:** Appreciate and support community volunteers

#### Process Evolution:

- **Regular Evaluation:** Quarterly assessment of governance effectiveness
- **Community Feedback:** Ongoing collection of input on process improvements
- **Adaptation Planning:** Systematic updating of processes based on experience
- **Innovation Documentation:** Record governance innovations for community learning

#### Movement Integration:

- **Peer Networks:** Connect with other Local Citizen Nodes for mutual learning
- **Regional Coordination:** Participate in Regional Digital Hub development
- **Policy Advocacy:** Engage in broader advocacy for supportive digital rights policies
- **Global Solidarity:** Contribute to international digital commons movement

### Templates and Checklists Summary

**SMS Voting Templates:** 4 ready-to-use message templates for different voting scenarios

**Consensus Process Guides:** Step-by-step protocols for inclusive community decision-making

**Meeting Facilitation Tools:** Agendas and structures for assemblies of different sizes

**Conflict Resolution Frameworks:** De-escalation and mediation approaches for community disagreements

**Emergency Decision Protocols:** Rapid response systems maintaining democratic accountability  
**Cultural Adaptation Guidelines:** Approaches for honoring diverse governance traditions  
**Implementation Checklists:** Month-by-month plans for establishing sustainable community governance

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## Next Steps and Support

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### Additional Resources:

- **Community Engagement Guide:** Strategies for building broad community participation
- **Conflict Resolution Manual:** Detailed approaches for community mediation and healing
- **Youth Leadership Toolkit:** Supporting young people in governance roles

**Technical Support:** Connect with regional technical networks for SMS system setup and troubleshooting

**Peer Learning:** Join online forums and regional meetings for sharing governance innovations and challenges

**Training and Development:** Access facilitation training and leadership development opportunities through movement networks

**Movement Building:** Contribute your governance innovations to the broader digital commons movement

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**Remember:** Effective community governance takes time to develop. Start with simple approaches, learn from experience, and gradually build the democratic capacity that enables your community to control its digital future. Every successful digital commons starts with communities learning to make decisions together.

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*This Governance Toolkit provides essential templates and protocols for democratic community decision-making. For comprehensive implementation support, consult the complete [Digital Commons Framework](#) and connect with peer networks through [globalgovernanceframework.org/digital](http://globalgovernanceframework.org/digital).*