

Appendix 3-B

Tips for Consensus Decision-Making¹

Principles of consensus decision making

1. Each participant is an equal, valued member of the group and contributes to the process.
2. Diverse opinions are essential and sought out.
3. Expert opinion does not count for more. Facts, beliefs, and opinions are equally valued.
4. Involve people early in the process and they are more likely to contribute positively.
5. Process is as important as outcome. The better the process, the more likely it is that results can be implemented.
6. Successful implementation depends upon shared ownership of process and decisions.

Consensus does not mean unanimity or total agreement

Consensus does not guarantee that each person gets his or her choice. However, the person must feel that she or he has had adequate opportunity to be heard. Each person in the group must believe that the decision was fair even if she or he does not agree.

The person should be able to say: “I understand what most of you want to do. That alternative is not my first choice, and I would like to do something else. I’ve had ample opportunity to have my views heard, and to try to convince you to do what I want to do, but I haven’t been able to. So, since the process has been open and fair, I’ll go along with what most of you want to do.”

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Effective consensus decision-making requires:

1. Clear communication about what is being decided, and through which process.
2. Open and respectful communication so that everyone in the group feels that she or he has had an equal chance to influence the decision.
3. Time for all participants to state their opinions and to be understood by the group.
4. Careful listening by all members of the group.
5. Different perspectives offered and discussed.

Note from Simone Joyaux: The theories of learning organizations and dialogue would add that the right questions must be asked, and participants must move beyond their own positions to examine the assumptions and patterns of interconnectedness, thus creating new knowledge and new ways of doing things.