

## FLOWCHART OF CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The following flowchart is an attempt to represent the process that we usually use in making decisions by consensus. We hope it will provide useful guidelines and a framework for discussion of process.

The top of the chart presents three situations in which a decision must be made -- resolving a particular problem, considering a proposal from outside the group, and choosing a new direction for the group. Any of these discussions begins with a clear statement of the topic. Then those people with background information present it and answer questions. If new ideas are needed they may be brainstormed by the group. Next, the group evaluates what additional information it may need and plans how to get it. Then each of the members of the group gives her/his opinion on the merit of the idea (and how much effort they personally can put into carrying it out) by going around the circle, breaking into small groups for discussion, or taking a straw vote. The group then summarizes and evaluates the commonalities and differences of opinion within the group.

At this point several paths can be taken -- the idea can be dropped for lack of interest; it can be tabled pending more information; or the group can continue to discuss it. Continued group discussion should clarify what agreements and disagreements exist and illuminate possible ways of resolving or bypassing the disagreements.

At the next step also, several paths can be taken -- the group can attempt to synthesize all opinions into a proposal; the group might feel pressured into choosing a "best" alternative (only in an emergency situation when there is insufficient time for synthesis); or the idea can be referred to a committee for further discussion (so the whole group doesn't need to spend time working out details).

Proposals should, if possible, synthesize all the ideas presented and accommodate everyone's concerns. If a proposal cannot encompass everyone's ideas, then it may be necessary to come up with a more general proposal which can. The facilitator (group) should not allow proposals that don't attempt to address everyone's concerns (e.g., a proposal that is really just someone's idea masquerading as a proposal). Often it is useful to break a proposal into several parts that can be easily dealt with, starting first with the parts that everyone can agree with and then moving on to the areas of disagreement.

The actual proposal is then checked to determine whether it addresses all the concerns raised earlier. Sometimes, a person's concerns cannot be addressed, but the person is willing to go along with everyone else (stand aside). Effort should be made to prevent this person from feeling railroaded or isolated.

If the discussion and synthesis processes have gone properly, the next few steps should be quite easy. The proposal is stated clearly, written down by the recorder, and then reread by the recorder. Any clarifying questions are answered and minor wording changes are made. Then the proposal is tested for consensus, that is, objections are sought. There may be a few small objections that can be corrected by amendments. If the amendments are too numerous or change the nature of the proposal, it may be necessary to go back and try once again to discuss and synthesize a satisfactory solution.

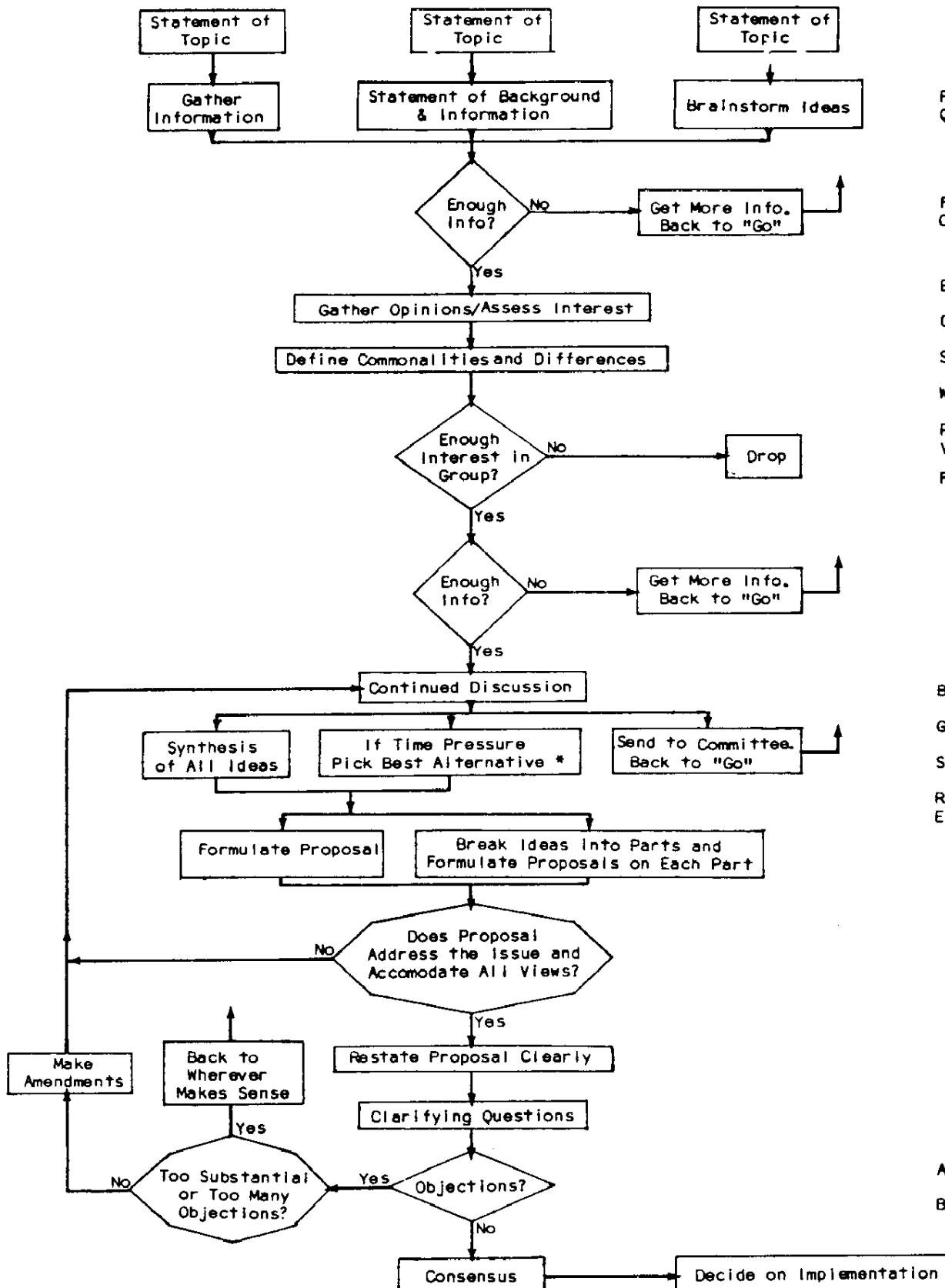
A common problem is making proposals prematurely, based on too little discussion -- that is, going to the bottom of the chart when we should still be near the top. This usually results in many amendments to the proposal, haggling, and much wasted time, before we return to the top or middle of the chart and start over. By proceeding carefully, though, we can achieve a satisfying and long-lasting consensus.

FLOWCHART OF CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Problem to Resolve

Proposal from Outside  
(other organizations  
or a committee)

Choosing New Direction



Special Methods

Report &  
Questions

Fact-Finding  
Committee

Break into Small Groups

Go Around the Circle

Straw Vote (Poll)

Write Out for All to See

Restate or List All  
Viewpoints Expressed

Poll of Interest

Break into Small Groups

Go Around the Circle

Silent Time to Think

Restate All Viewpoints  
Expressed

A Minute of Silence

Be Sensitive to Bad Vibes

\* This path should only be taken in emergency situation.

## ROLE OF FACILITATOR

watches content of meeting  
 formulate agenda  
 (beforehand if possible)  
 listens on speakers  
 helps group to:  
 clarify issues  
 focus discussion  
 prioritize  
 bring out all viewpoints  
 look for underlying agreements  
 synthesize differences  
 states proposals  
 normalizes decisions  
 equalizes participation  
 draws out quiet people  
 limits talkers  
 uses facilitation tools  
 stays impartial when facilitating

## TOOLS FOR FACILITATING MEETINGS

brainstorming  
 rounds  
 all group discussions  
 dyads/triads  
 feeling sharing  
 show of hands  
 participation equalizers  
 straw polls  
 situations  
 visual aids  
 role playing  
 role plays  
 missions/goals exercises

## MODIFIED CONSENSUS FOR LARGE GROUPS

spokes councils  
 empowered spokes  
 role group blocks  
 maximum stand asides  
 all back agreements

TOOLS II WILL COVER SPOKES  
 COUNCILS MORE IN DEPTH)

## ROLE OF VIBESWATCHER

Watches the process of meeting  
 Senses underlying feelings  
 (check body language)  
 Stops bad process  
 (put-downs, guilt trips,  
 domineering, space-outs,  
 interrupting)  
 two-hands for process comment  
 Helps resolve conflict  
 Helps resolve negative emotions  
 (fear, anger, anxiety, etc.)  
 Suggests tools  
 to improve the process  
 (see list below)  
 Sets an accepting tone  
 Deals with outside distractions

## TOOLS FOR STRESS/ CONFLICT RESOLUTION

breathing deep  
 silence  
 new games  
 new songs  
 breaks  
 humor  
 back rubs  
 calm voice  
 eye contact  
 feeling sharing  
 active listening  
 modelling opposite viewpoints  
 criticism/self-criticism  
 resentment sharing  
 affirmations  
 mediations

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

1. THESE TOOLS HELP BRING OUT A GROUP'S PARTICULAR INDIVIDUALITY. BE FLEXIBLE/CREATIVE, AND CAREFUL NOT TO LET THE PROCESS DOMINATE THE GROUP'S SPIRIT --salud--
2. ONLY THROUGH USE CAN THESE IDEAS BE LEARNED. WITH USE WILL COME INNOVATION. PLEASE SEND SUGGESTIONS/ CRITICISMS OF THIS LISTING TO:  
 BAY AREA NONVIOLENCE PREPARERS  
 BOX 40165  
 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94140

## AGENDAS/MEETING PROCEDURES

### BEFORE MEETING: (if possible)

- choose facilitator
- gather agenda items
- delegate responsibility for each item
- divide into reports/decisions/announcements
- bring materials/supplies needed

### AT MEETING:

- Connect (game, ritual, song, etc.)
- Check-in/excitement-sharing
- Review agenda items
  - prioritize
  - set times
- Choose roles (or rotate)
  - facilitator (see backside)
  - vibeswatcher (see backside)
  - notetaker
  - timekeeper
- Go through agenda
  - take an easy item first
    - (for example reports then decisions)
  - break large issues into smaller parts for discussion/decision
- Take breaks/play together
- Announcements
- Set next meeting
- Evaluation
- Closing

## REACHING CONSENSUS (STEPS TO MAKING A DECISION)

### BACKGROUND

- what are we talking about?
- what needs to be decided?

### DISCUSSION

- what are all viewpoints?

### PROPOSAL MADE

- what action will group take?
- incorporate all viewpoints

### DISCUSS PROPOSAL

- clarifying questions/concerns
- good points

### FRIENDLY AMENDMENTS

- proposal may be modified or
- withdrawn with proposer's consent

### TEST FOR CONSENSUS (re-state proposal first)

- A. call for strong concerns
- B. call for objections within consensus
  - (reservations/standing aside--"This may be a mistake, but I can live with it.")
- C. call for blocks (on strong moral grounds)--
  - if blocked, proposal dropped or further discussion or send to committee

### CONSENSUS REACHED

- sometimes with a show of agreement

### DECISION IMPLEMENTED

- who does what?