

## **Consensus Decision-Making**

There are many meanings to the word "consensus." And there are many variations in the ways groups use "consensus decision-making." These differences are expressed in the articles and other resources on this website. The following unifying principles, however, form a common trunk from which different branches grow.

### **Inclusive**

In a consensus process all group members are included and encouraged to participate. Further, the needs of all stakeholders affected by a decision are included in the deliberations.

### **Agreement Seeking**

Consensus decision-making is a process that seeks widespread or full agreement. Groups using consensus commit themselves to the goal of generating as much agreement as possible. Different groups may have different decision rules (standards for how much agreement is necessary to finalize a decision). Regardless of the ultimate decision rule, however, all groups using a consensus process strive for the full agreement of all participants.

### **Process Oriented**

Consensus decision-making highlights the process of making decisions, not just the result. In a consensus process all participants are respected and their contributions are welcome. Power leveraging, adversarial positioning, and other group manipulation tactics are specifically discouraged by the facilitator or by the structure of the discussion. The way in which the decision is made is as important as the resulting decision.

### **Collaborative**

Consensus decision-making is a collaborative process. All members of the group contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets all the concerns of group members as much as possible. This is distinctly different from an adversarial process wherein participants compete for the group's support, and the concerns of the losing parties are not addressed by the winning proposal.

### **Relationship Building**

Consensus decision-making has an over-arching goal of building

group relationships through discussion. The effort to gain widespread agreement and include all perspectives is intended to support positive relationships between participants. The resulting shared ownership of decisions and increased group cohesion can make implementation of decisions and future discussions proceed in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

### **Whole Group Thinking**

Consensus decision-making places value on individuals thinking about the good of the whole group. Participants are encouraged to voice their personal perspectives fully so that the group benefits from hearing all points of view. But participants are also expected to pay attention to the needs of the whole group. Ultimately, personal preferences are less important than a broader understanding of how to work together to help the group succeed.

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**Majority rule** is a decision rule that selects alternatives which have a majority, that is, more than half the votes. It is the binary decision rule used most often in influential decision-making bodies, including the legislatures of democratic nations.