

A Checklist for the Consensus Process and Facilitation

These are just some of the many ways to conduct a meeting using the consensus process. Roles should be carried out by everyone as needed — not just the person specially designated.

Basic Procedure

Before the meeting (or at previous meeting):

- Choose facilitator(s)
- Gather agenda items
- Determine presenter/initiator for each item
- Determine item type: announcement, report, discussion, decision
- Bring materials/supplies needed

At the meeting:

- Connect (game, song, ritual, etc.)
- Check-in/excitement-sharing
- Agenda review: agree on order and time
- Choose notetaker, timekeeper, vibeswatcher
- Step through the agenda (big or little first?)
- Take breaks
- Announcements
- Set next meeting
- Evaluation (good, bad, better)
- Closing (game, song, ritual, etc.)

The Flow of a Cooperative Decision-Making Process

Background

- What are we talking about? .Issue raised- what is the problem?
- Clarify problem — put it in context

Discuss, bring out a diversity of ideas, concerns, and perspectives — look at possible solutions and the problems with those solutions

Develop Proposal /Proposal Made

- Clarifying Questions
- Concerns
- Discussion / Friendly Amendments
- Re-state Proposal

Test for Consensus

- Strong concerns /objections
- Stand Asides
- Blocks
- Consensus

Consensus Reached

Decision Implemented – who does what? Make sure there are no loose ends

- Restate the decision for the note taker (including implementation)

Tools for Successful Meetings

- Brainstorms, Popcorn (no order, just popping in)
- Go around the circle, rounds
- Stacking (count off - limit to 3-5),
- Small-group discussion, dyads, tryads
- Advantages/disadvantages chart
- Straw Polls – sense of group
- Visual aids, Visible notes
- Criteria Process
- Goals'/priorities-setting techniques, dots
- Challenges/devil's advocate questions
- Participation equalizers (pebbles, etc.)
- Active listening in pairs
- Support groups/caucuses, Feelings sharing
- Fishbowls, Role plays

Typical Tasks of Facilitators

- Helps formulate agenda
- Helps establish a hopeful, upbeat, and safe atmosphere
- Helps group work through decisions:
 - Calls on Speakers
 - Asks for clarification
 - Summarizes, sorts, focuses discussion — lists threads of thought, agreements, and disagreements
 - Helps prioritize and order discussion topics
 - Brings out all viewpoints
 - Looks for underlying agreements
 - Synthesizes differences
 - Restates Proposal, Limits proposals on floor
 - Formalizes Decisions
- Encourages equal participation
 - Draws out quiet people
 - Limits Talkers
- Uses Facilitation Tools
- Stays neutral while facilitating

Typical Tasks of a Vibeswatcher ("Caretaker")

- Watches the **process** of the meeting
- Notices underlying feelings from tone of voice and body language, points out tension and weariness, recommends changes
- Stops bad process (domineering, guilt-tripping, interrupting, put-downs, bulldozing, defensiveness, space-outs, etc.)
- Helps resolve conflicts
- Helps work out negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, hopelessness)
- Suggests tools to improve meetings
- Helps create a safe, accepting tone
- Deals with outside distractions

Tools for Stress-Reduction/Conflict Resolution

- Stretch breaks/cooperative games
- Singing
- Humor
- Affirmations
- Feelings sharing
- Silence (mediation, prayer)
- Calm voice
- Making LOUD noises
- Eye contact
- Breathing (deep)
- Back rubs
- Fears in the hat
- Appreciations/affirmations
- Active listening
- I-messages
- Restating other's viewpoint / modeling opposite views
- Support groups / Caucuses
- Venting emotions somewhere else
- Gripe sessions – share feelings
- Resentment sharing
- Fishbowls
- Spectrums
- Expulsion – based on agreements, questions

WHY CONSENSUS?

1. It's open, participatory and democratic, every voice counts
2. Based on the principles of the group – value based in trust, cooperation, good will
3. Good for large groups – dynamic process that allows ideas to build on one another
4. Is not inherently time-consuming
5. It is difficult to secretly disrupt it or influence it – forces people to take responsibility for disruptive actions

Consensus is process for adopting proposals. People who do not agree are responsible for voicing their concerns. No decision is made until concerns are addressed. When concerns remain after discussion and debate individual can agree to disagree by acknowledging unresolved concerns and standing aside allowing the proposal to move to adoption. The decision does not assume that everybody is in complete agreement.

Basic Steps

Level One: Present Proposal
Clarifying Questions
General Discussion
Test for Consensus

Level Two: List All Concerns
Discussion
Call for Consensus

Level Three: Restate and deal with each concern
Clarifying questions on each concern
Discuss one concern at a time
Are concerns resolved

Closing Options: Non support
Reservations
Stand Aside
Block