

Why consensus?

Everyone's voice is heard!

Finding innovative solutions that work for everyone!

Everyone feels valued and a part!

Allows for new, better, ideas to emerge!

Avoids tyranny of the minority, majority, or anything else!

Challenges with consensus...

Can be time consuming

- BUT is worth it to consider all the options and have group ownership; this also lessens as the group develops trust and practice

Absence of hierarchy can allow loud voices to dominate

- BUT a good facilitator, who values structure but not hierarchy, can make sure everyone has a chance to express themselves, making it a truly inclusive process

Fundamentally different values + constant blocking

- BUT by explaining where your points are coming from and developing a strong group basis of unity before hand, this can be avoided

Norms for working together

Step up, step up

Step up and share your valuable ideas, opinion, and experience, but also be aware of when you are taking up a lot of space and instead step up to being an active listener

W.A.I.T.

Ask yourself: Why Am I Talking?

Respect

No classism, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia etc

Expect to challenge and be challenged

We have a lot to learn from each other, so be open to share and challenge people, as well as having people challenge your assumptions

Use "I" Statements

You can only speak from your own experience, what resonates for you may not for everyone else, be clear and explicit about this

Check yourself

Be aware of the privilege, named and unnamed, you bring into the space, and the impact they have on the discussion

Add any other norms or ideas that your group develops together before discussing them all and coming to a consensus

Empower not over power!

A quick guide to consensus decision making



What is consensus anyways?

A decision making process where all decisions are made as a group, by listening to each other, discussing concerns, and developing new solutions until something that works for everyone can be agreed upon by all group members

LIBERTY - to share, express individual opinions, block, or withdraw

EQUITY - everyone holds equal weight and should be listened to

SOLIDARITY - everyone is there to support each other and achieve a common goal

Roles

Facilitator

Keeps the “stack”, guides discussion, listens and reiterates when necessary, etc

Rotating facilitators between meetings can develop capacity and prevent hierarchies

Minute Taker

Records meeting, key action items, decisions taken, etc

Vibes and Time Watcher

Observes the mood of the meeting, calling for energizers or breaks when necessary, and keeps the group informed of time elapsed

Tools of Consensus

Agenda

Discuss the agenda (meeting plan) and timelines before checking for consensus

Check-ins

Have folks introduce themselves and say how they feel about the meeting and generally; so everyone knows the energy in the space

The “stack”

A speakers list kept by the facilitator

Go rounds

Going in a circle and with everyone speaking to an agenda point; folks can pass and to avoid repetition, refer to others’ comments

Hand signals



Add to the stack—when someone wants to speak they use one finger to motion this to the facilitator, once the facilitator has nodded at them, they know they’ve been added to the stack

Jazz fingers—to support a comment or idea, with out having to explicitly saying it



Clarification—to ask a specific question or get clarification to understand what is going on (jumps the stack)

Process point—to draw attention to the fact that proper process is not being followed (jumps the stack)



Proposal—to put forward a concrete proposal on the discussion at hand that consensus could potentially be found on (jumps the stack)

Direct response—to directly respond to a question asked or give a piece of information that would clarify discussions (jumps the stack)



Take it to the bar—when discussion gets off topic or into personal conversation, tell them to “take it to the bar”

Jargon finger—when a term or acronym is used that everyone may not be aware of, ask for an explanation with the jargon finger “aarr!”



Straw poll

A tally of how folks feel on a proposal by raising hands before checking for consensus

Checking for consensus



Yes—to indicate that you like or can live with the proposal

Stand aside—to show that you are ok with the proposal but will not participate



Block—to show that you can not live with the proposal, if with only one block, return to discussions to find a proposal everyone can live with (not to be abused)

Check outs

A final go round to see how folks are feeling and what they are taking out the meeting

Spokes councils

When a group is too large for one meeting, it can be divided into multiple groups who use consensus to discuss agenda point(s) and proposals. They then pick a spoke to meet with spokes from other groups, sharing and coming to decisions. Sometimes spokes will have to return to their group to rediscuss.

