

## Consensus

Consensus is a way for a group of equals to make decisions. The process rests on the fundamental belief that each person has a piece of the truth. The principle goals of consensus are non-violent resolution of conflict and the collaborative development of decisions that everyone in the group can support. Consensus decisions can be changed only by reaching another consensus.

# Elements of Effective Consensus

1. common purpose
2. willingness to share power
3. informed commitment to the process
4. clear agenda
5. effective facilitation

## Ground Rules for Participants in Consensus Groups

1. begin and end on time
2. use a facilitator
3. one speaker at a time
4. speak only for yourself
5. no put-downs
6. no blaming

7. no interrupting
8. everyone participates
9. no one may speak twice on a subject until everyone who wants to speak for the first time has spoken
10. silence equals assent
11. participants strive to use guidelines of honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, flexibility, trust and principles before personalities

## **Procedures**

1. Define the problem or decision to be reached by consensus.
2. Figure out what must be done to reach a solution.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions.
4. Discuss pros and cons of the narrowed down list of ideas/solutions.

5. Adjust, compromise and fine-tune so that all group members are satisfied.
6. Make your decision. If a consensus is not reached, review and/or repeat steps 1-5.
7. Once the decision has been made, act upon what you decide.

# Participant's Action Options

1. To Block
2. To Stand Aside
3. To Give Consent

1. **To Block.** This step prevents the decision from going forward, at least for the time being. Blocking is a serious matter, to be done only when one truly believes that the pending proposal, if adopted, would violate the <sup>concepts, principles</sup> morals, ethics or safety of the whole group. One probably has a lifetime limit of three to four blocks, so this right should be

exercised with great care. If you frequently find yourself wanting to block, you should join another group.

2. **To Stand Aside.** An individual stand aside when he or she cannot personally support a proposal, but feels it would be all right for the rest of the group to adopt it. Standing aside is a stance of principled nonparticipation, which absolves the individual from any responsibility for implementing the decision in question. If there are more than a few stand asides, consensus has not yet been reached.

3. **To Give Consent.** When everyone in the group (except those standing aside), says, “yes” to a proposal, consensus is achieved. To give one’s consent does not necessarily mean that one loves every aspect of the proposal, but it does mean that one is willing to support the decision and stand in solidarity with the group, despite one’s disagreements.

## **Role of Facilitator**

A facilitator is the custodian of the consensus process, a trusted servant whose purpose is to help the group make the best decisions possible. A facilitator is a guide, not a participant in the discussion. He or she must be assiduously neutral about the topics being discussed and fair in the treatment of all members of the group.

A collective opinion

General agreement

# A mutually satisfactory position

An agreement on  
some decision by all  
members of a group,  
rather than a majority

Poling

Common ground

A sound solution  
acceptable to everyone

**Consensus exists when each member of the group can say:**

1. I have had the opportunity to voice my opinions.
2. I believe the group has heard me.

3. I can actively support the group's decision as the best possible at this time, even if it is not my first choice.