



Unit: Group Decision Making
Skill 37: Building Consensus
Activity B: Agreeing to Disagree
Worksheet

The Consensus Process

A consensus process aims at bringing the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. It does not require unanimity. In some cases, consensus can take longer than other processes, but it fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions.

Consensus asks us to step out of our narrow personal agendas and to make decisions that are in *the best interest of the whole group*. This is not to say that personal concerns are left out of the process. Effects on or agendas of individuals impact the whole group and are taken into consideration during the discussion portion of the process. Someone who has a personal concern with a proposal, but who has had their issues deliberated on by the group and feels they can live with the decision can allow a decision to be made by "standing aside." A "block" is a person's way of disallowing a decision. A block is only used when a person has a strong moral disagreement or thinks that the decision will fundamentally damage the group. It is not a step to be taken lightly.

The steps of consensus are:

- 1. State the issue.** What are we talking about? The facilitator asks the person who brought the issue to the group to frame the issue.
- 2. Clarify the question.** What needs to be decided? The facilitator or the framer states what needs to be decided.
- 3. Discussion.** What are all the viewpoints? The facilitator asks each person to speak to the issue.
- 4. Make a proposal.** The facilitator asks for proposals describing action the group can take that incorporates all viewpoints.
- 5. Discussion.** The facilitator asks people to speak to proposals by asking clarifying Questions or by expressing support or concerns.
- 6. Modify the proposal** by friendly amendments or withdraw the proposal and solicit a new one.
- 7. Test for consensus.**
 - Call for concerns - The facilitator restates the proposal and asks if anyone still has concerns. If so, the person with concerns is asked to restate them and others speak to those concerns.
 - Call for objections within consensus - If people still have concerns even after they have been thorough!}' discussed, the facilitator asks if those persons with remaining concerns are willing to stand aside. ("I think I don't agree but I can live with it.")
 - Call for blocks -If persons with concerns cannot stand aside then the facilitator asks if they are blocking. If blocked, the proposal is dropped or discussed further or sent to committee.
- 8. Consensus reached.** If there are no blocks, ask everyone to show visual (finger waving) or oral agreement.
- 9. Decision implemented.** Who does what when?

Adapted from: Decision-making: The Citizen's Handbook. www.vcn.bc.ca/citizenshandbook/l_08_lead.html