



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

Activity Skills:

Group discussion.

Leadership Skills:

Learning about the consensus method.

Suggested Level:

Advanced

Time:

30 minutes

Supplies needed:

- Flipchart paper – several sheets for each group.
- Markers.

Do Ahead:

- Make copies of worksheet

Source:

Developed by:
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Based On:

Growing Communities Curriculum: Community Building and Organizational Development through Community Gardening, American Community Gardening Association

BACKGROUND:

When we make decisions as a group, there are several approaches. One is that a few leaders choose for the larger group, and another is that everyone votes and majority rules. However these approaches mean that some people “lose.” Sometimes this is okay, as in very large groups where there is a wide range of perspectives. But in smaller groups or organizations, where consideration can be given to the individual, the consensus method provides another approach.

Consensus asks us to move beyond our personal perspectives and consider the good of the group. That doesn’t mean that personal views don’t come through, but once voiced, a person can opt to stand aside and allow the dialogue to continue. A “block” is made only when a person has so strong an objection that they cannot let the decision-making process continue. Let’s review the handout for the consensus method.

WHAT TO DO:

Depending on the size of the group, either divide into large groups of 8-10 people, or remain in one large group. Have each group figure out who will serve as their facilitator (not the training facilitator), and who will serve as the scribe. Each group will need to brainstorm a list of guidelines for effective meetings.

Once the group has listed their guidelines, create a list of 10 that everyone agrees on; try to consolidate and condense without losing the core ideas. After this process has narrowed the list, the facilitator will then propose having each person write down or state their recommendations for the top 10. Work to get your top 10 guidelines by hearing from each person and with general agreement from everyone. Bring everyone together and have the groups post their guidelines for others to see.

TALK IT OVER:**Reflect:**

- How did the process work for your group?
- Was there disagreement? How was it handled?
- Are you pleased with your group’s final recommendations?

Apply:

- Have you experienced difficult discussion or meetings?
- How was the decision-making handled?
- Did people leave feeling positive about the outcome?

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Notes:

- Can you see applications of the consensus method?
- Do you think that the end result of discussions and meetings would change if everyone had a more equal voice?

BEYOND THE BOX:

Optional Homework:

Write up a contentious meeting that you have observed. How were the decisions made? How were people's views acknowledged? Did everyone have a chance to speak? Was the decision reached by consensus? What would have been different if the consensus method was used?

Resources And Web Links:

Abi-Nader, Jeanette, Kendall Dunnigan, and Kristin Markley. 2001. *Growing Communities Curriculum: Community Building and Organizational Development through Community Gardening*, American Community Gardening Association