

LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TIP SHEETS

Consensus Building

WHAT IS CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING?

Consensus is a cooperative process in which all group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole. In consensus decision making, the input of every participant is carefully considered and there is a good faith effort to address all legitimate concerns.¹

Arietta and Wallace define consensus as "a journey and a destination."² Consensus doesn't mean that everyone agrees or that some have changed their ideas or perspectives. As a product, consensus represents a resolution—a decision that may not completely satisfy all participants but is supported by all group members. Consensus also means participants agree to support the decision. This is known as modified consensus

**Consensus
as a Process**

• Consensus requires discussion to identify issues, clarify questions, establish decision-making criteria and address all concerns. The goal is to create understanding of the issues and then share the perspectives of all involved.

**Consensus
as a Product**

• Consensus is the outcome of a consensus-building process. After listening to all perspectives, participants develop a proposal that honors the wisdom of the group. A consensus decision reflects mutual agreement to support a decision, and commitment to take action steps for the benefit of the group and the project.

WHY USE CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING?

- It engages participants inclusively and empowers the group
- It requires a commitment to work together and increases cooperation
- It creates shared understanding through discussion that bridges differences
- It results in more effective implementation because it removes winners and losers that you get from voting processes

¹ Dressler, L. (2006) *Consensus through conversation*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

² Arietta, D. L., & Wallace, L. (2000). *Consensus building fieldbook*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Extension and Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

CONNECTING TO YOUR WORK

As you facilitate the planning process for a collaborative partnership, you can use a number of techniques for consensus building as shown in the diagram to the right.



CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING IS IMPORTANT WHEN:

There are many stakeholders and perspectives for a complex problem.

People are willing to participate.

The group has authority to make decisions and will be affected by them.

Creative solutions are needed.

You need everyone involved to be committed to the decision or plan.

EXAMPLES OF CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING IN PUBLIC PLANNING

Agricultural Producers: Decision making in Cooperatives with Diverse Member Interests. Source <http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/pdf/rr155.pdf>

The Parks and Recreation Public Participation Manual for Park Planning; Raleigh, North Carolina. Source <https://www.ncsu.edu/nrli/decision-making/projects/documents/FinalPublicParticipationGuidelines05-14-12.pdf>

This handout is adapted from a tip sheet prepared by Rachel Hefte, UMN Extension Educator, Leadership and Civic Engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/civic-engagement/tip-sheets/consensus-decision-making/>