

Consensus Based Decision-Making Workshop

Consensus decision-making is based on the belief that each person has some part of the truth, but no one has all the truth. We can make better decisions by putting our pieces together than any one of us could make on our own.

Good group decisions are all about peace making for a greater number of people. And they respect the time and energy of those who contribute.

A key element to making consensus work is personal humility. By recognizing the limits of your own experiences you open the way to learn new things.

When people join their energy streams, miracles can happen.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

Margaret Mead

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Twelve Concepts for NA Service

- 1. To fulfill our fellowship's primary purpose, the NA groups have joined together to create a structure which develops, coordinates, and maintains services on behalf of NA as a whole.**
- 2. The final responsibility and authority for NA services rests with the NA groups.**
- 3. The NA groups delegate to the service structure the authority necessary to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to it.**
- 4. Effective leadership is highly valued in Narcotics Anonymous. Leadership qualities should be carefully considered when selecting trusted servants.**
- 5. For each responsibility assigned to the service structure, a single point of decision and accountability should be clearly defined.**
- 6. Group conscience is the spiritual means by which we invite a loving God to influence our decisions.**
- 7. All members of a service body bear substantial responsibility for that body's decisions and should be allowed to fully participate in its decision-making processes.**
- 8. Our service structure depends on the integrity and effectiveness of our communications.**
- 9. All elements of our service structure have the responsibility to carefully consider all viewpoints in their decision-making processes.**
- 10. Any member of a service body can petition that body for the redress of a personal grievance, without fear of reprisal.**
- 11. NA funds are to be used to further our primary purpose, and must be managed responsibly.**
- 12. In keeping with the spiritual nature of Narcotics Anonymous, our structure should always be one of service, never of government.**

Here is a little brief history of how we got where we are today. After that I will go into the presentation. Several years ago the Arkansas Region of Narcotics Anonymous, as well as the worldwide fellowship, passed *The Guide to Local Services*. A few years ago we agreed to attempt to implement this into our regional guidelines. During the redraft of our regional guidelines, we passed motions that changed our regional policy on voting. One of these changes was that we attempt to use consensus based decision-making. Our guidelines currently state the following.

(Excerpt from page 7 of the Arkansas Region of Narcotics Anonymous Guidelines)

6. The ARSCNA utilizes a consensus based decision-making process. A consensus is considered to be a 2/3rds majority of the participating votes in agreement. All effort should be made to further understanding and discussion of any issue on the floor until a consensus is reached.

7. All decisions requiring a vote at the ARSCNA be decided upon in the following manner:

- a. An attempt at an overall consensus to be attempted first.*
- b. If an overall consensus cannot be reached, then a paper ballot will be taken.*
- c. In order for a decision to pass, it will require a two-thirds majority.*

(This was adopted in June 2000)

Since this was adopted very little has been done to further the use of consensus based decision-making. There have been some individuals that have worked towards this. For our purposes we have agreed to use a consensus based procedure, as opposed to a complete 100% consensus. If an attempt at consensus fails we have agreed to revert back to parliamentary procedure and require a 2/3rds majority for any issue to pass.

*Developing a collective conscience provides us with the spiritual guidance we need for making service decisions. We pray or meditate together, we share with one another, we consider our traditions, and we seek direction from a Higher Power. Our groups, service boards, and committees often use the vote as a rough tool for translating that spiritual guidance into clear, decisive terms. Sometimes, however, no vote is needed; following thoughtful, attentive discussions, it is perfectly apparent what our collective conscience would have us do in a given service situation. Just as we seek the strongest possible spiritual unity in Narcotics Anonymous, so in our decision making we seek unanimity, not merely a majority vote. The more care we take in our considerations, the more likely we are to arrive at unanimity, and no vote will be needed to help us translate our group conscience into a collective decision. (Reprinted from our 6th Concept, from *The Twelve Concepts* booklet)*

Consensus vs. voting

Voting is a means by which we choose one alternative from several. Consensus, on the other hand, is a process of synthesizing many diverse elements together.

Voting is a win or lose model, in which people are more often concerned with the numbers it takes to "win" than with the issue itself. Voting does not take into account individual feelings or needs. In essence, it is a quantitative, rather than qualitative, method of decision-making.

With consensus people can and should work through differences and reach a mutually satisfactory position. It is possible for one person's insights or strongly held beliefs to sway the whole group. No ideas are lost, each member's input is valued as part of the solution.

A group committed to consensus may utilize other forms of decision making (individual, compromise, majority rules) when appropriate.

How do we know a group decision is good?

A "good group decision" results in *peace, prosperity, and is made efficiently.*

Good group decisions are all about peace making for a greater number of people. And they respect the time and energy of those who contribute.

Peace. When a group makes a good decision, peace among the group itself and among those within the group's sphere of influence is increased. The best decisions are those that result in general approval of the decision after it's made. The decision is honored over time.

Prosperity. When a group makes a good decision, prosperity of the group as a whole and the group's sphere of influence is increased. To move toward peace at the same time, decisions result in rising prosperity among the group. Prospects are improved for higher quality of life among more people.

Efficiency. When a group makes a good decision, the process is efficient. Participants don't feel that their time is being wasted. Participants believe that the time and energy they spend in the decision making process is worth the benefits.

What is Consensus?

Consensus is a group process where the input of everyone is carefully considered and an outcome is crafted that best meets the needs of the group. It is a process of synthesizing the wisdom of all the participants into the best decision possible at the time. Consensus is based on faith, that each person has some part of the truth and no one has all of it (no matter how much we like to believe that we ourselves know it all). When you consent to a decision, you are giving your permission to the group to go ahead with the decision. You may disagree with the decision, but based on listening to everyone else's input, all the individuals agree to let the decision go forward, because the decision is the best one the entire group can achieve at the current time. Consensus needs four ingredients -- a group of people willing to work together, a problem or issue that requires a decision by the group, trust that there is a solution, and perseverance to find the truth.

The heart of consensus is a cooperative intent, where the members are willing to work together to find the solution that meets the needs of the group. The cooperative nature of consensus is different mindset from the competitive nature of majority voting. In a consensus process the members come together to find or create the best solutions by working together. Key attributes to successful participation include humility, willingness to listen to others and see their perspectives, and willingness to share your own ideas but not insist they are the best ones. Built into the consensual process is the belief that all persons have some part of the truth in them, or what in spiritual terms might be called "some part of God." We will reach a better decision by putting all of the pieces of the truth together before proceeding. There are indeed times when it appears that two pieces of the truth are in contradiction with each other, but with clear thinking and attention, the whole may be perceived including both pieces, or many pieces. The traditional either/or type of argument does not advance this process. Instead, the consensus process is a search for the very best solution -- whatever the problem.

What consensus is not

It is not unanimous agreement. Participants may consent to a decision they disagree with, but recognize it meets the needs of the group and therefore give permission to move forward.

Why use consensus?

Consensus gathers the experiences from the whole group

The more people involved in this cooperative process, the more ideas and possibilities are generated. Consensus works best with everyone participating. It is easy for people to unquestioningly rely on authorities and experts to do their thinking and decision-making for them. Consensus promotes and depends upon self empowerment. Anyone can express concerns. Everyone seeks creative solutions and is responsible for every decision. When all are encouraged to participate, the democratic nature of the process increases.

The Seventh Concept is one way of putting the principle of group conscience to work in the service environment. This concept suggests that each service body should encourage all its members to participate in its decision-making process. By bringing their different perspectives together, we give our service bodies the opportunity to develop a fully informed, balanced group conscience leading to sound, sensitive service decisions.

Our service boards and committees represent a cross-section of NA perspective and experience. Each participant's contribution to the decision-making process is important. Determining participation at the group level is fairly simple: if you're a group member, you may fully participate in the group's decision-making process. Determining participation in the decision-making processes of most service boards and committees is a little more involved, yet the same basic principles still apply. Freely expressed individual conscience is the essential element in group conscience at any level. (Reprinted from our 7th Concept, from The Twelve Concepts booklet)

Consensus builds relationships between people

In a consensus process, people extend their relationships to each other as part of the listening and talking process. It is also based on a respect for all persons involved in the decision being considered. Consensus takes time and effort, honest communication and a willingness to trust the relationship. The communication of ideas and feelings, and the empathetic listening, builds trust and bonds between group members. By encouraging shared leadership and participation, consensus empowers all the members of a group to make the best decision. By working together to clarify ideas and proposals, the members build trust and communication skills that continue to grow and expand as the group works together. The longer the group works together, the better they get. The building of agreements also builds a strong sense of commitment to the group and its mission, and a sense of belonging and commitment among the members. The consensus process makes direct application of the idea that all persons are equal. If we do indeed trust one another and do believe that we all have parts of the truth, then we can remember that one person may know more of the truth at one time, while another person may know more at another time. Even when we have all the facts before us, it may be the spirit that is lacking; and this may come forth from yet another who sees the whole better than anyone else. Everybody's contributions are important. When people join their energy streams, miracles can happen.

Consensus moves toward doing what is best for the common interest

The key element of making consensus work is a commitment by each individual to honor the best interests of the group. As people work through issues, they have their own needs reflected back to them against the context of the larger group needs. This encourages them to consider other interests beyond just their own. The goal of consensus is not the selection of several options, but the development of one decision which is the best for the whole group. In joining a group, one accepts a personal responsibility to behave with respect, good will, and honesty. Each one is expected to recognize that the group's needs have a certain priority over the desires of the individual. It is important to accept the shared responsibility for helping to find solutions to other's concerns.

Ingredients of successful consensus process

The fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will. The fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard.

Facilitation.

Some of the group members have an understanding and the skills for running a consensus process. It is important that the facilitator never show signs of impatience. The facilitator is the servant of the group, not its leader. Often there are participants who want to talk more than necessary and others who don't speak enough. The facilitator needs to be able to keep the discussion from being dominated by a few and to encourage those who have not spoken to share their thoughts. There are a number of techniques for achieving this. One method is to suggest that no one speak more than once, until everyone has spoken. Another method is to also limit the amount of time a person can speak (such as a 3 minute rule) In the heat of discussion, people are usually resistant to interrupting the flow to take a break, but a wise facilitator knows, more often than not, that a five minute break will save a frustrating half hour or more of circular discussion and fruitless debate. The usefulness of polling within consensus is primarily clarification of the relative importance of several issues. It is an especially useful technique when the facilitator is confused or uncertain about the status of a proposal and wants some clarity to be able to suggest what might be the next process technique. Polls are not decisions and are non-binding. All too often, straw polls are used when the issues are completely clear and the majority wants to intimidate the minority into submission by showing overwhelming support rather than to discuss the issues and resolve the concerns. Clear and simple questions are best. Polls that involve three or more choices can be especially manipulative. Use with discretion.

Participants understand the process.

The participants have a basic understanding of what consensus is, how the group applies it, and what the expectations of the group are.

Cooperation.

A willingness among the participants to trust the wisdom of the group and to cooperate. When winning arguments becomes more important than achieving the group's goals, cooperation is difficult, if not impossible. Adversarial attitudes toward proposals or people focus attention on weakness rather than strength. An attitude of helpfulness and support builds cooperation. Cooperation is a shared responsibility in finding solutions to all concerns. Ideas offered in the spirit of cooperation help resolve conflict. The best decisions arise through an open and creative interplay of ideas.

A safe place to talk about the decision at hand.

The group environment needs to be comfortable so that individuals will freely share their ideas and thoughts, fears, opinions and experiences.

Ideas are heard and acknowledged.

Each participant feels that their contributions are considered. They might not be part of the final solution but the ideas were fairly and equally considered.

It's easy to discuss things with those who agree with us. But in recovery we've learned that our own best thinking may not necessarily offer us the best possible guidance. We have been taught that, before making significant decisions, we should check our judgment against the ideas of others. Our experience has shown us that the ideas of those who disagree with us are often the ones we need most to hear. The Ninth Concept puts this aspect of our recovery experience to work in the service environment. When making a decision, our groups, service boards, and committees should actively seek out all available viewpoints.

An effective group conscience is a fully informed group conscience. The Ninth Concept is one tool we use to help ensure that our group conscience is as well-informed as it can possibly be. In any discussion, it is tempting to ignore dissenting members, especially if that vast majority of members think alike. Yet it is often the lone voice, offering new information or a unique perspective on things, that saves us from hasty or misinformed decisions. In Narcotics Anonymous, we are encouraged to respect that lone voice, to protect it, even to seek it out, for without it our service decisions would undoubtedly suffer.

Concept Nine also encourages us, individually, to frankly speak our minds in discussions of service issues, even when most other members think differently. No, this concept is not telling us to become perpetual nay-sayers, objecting to anything agreed to by the majority. It does say, however, that we are responsible to share our thoughts and our conscience with our fellow members, carefully explaining our position and listening with equal care to the positions of others. When we show the courage necessary to speak our mind, while also showing respect for one another, we can be confident that we act in the best interests of the NA Fellowship. By insisting on thorough discussion of important issues, the worst we can do is take a little of each other's time; at best, we protect the fellowship from the consequences of a hasty or misinformed decision.

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The expression of the individual conscience to the group is the foundation of group conscience. Without it, we block the guidance of a loving God, our ultimate authority. When a position supported by many of us is challenged by a few of us, our service boards and committees should always treat such input with great respect and careful consideration. The information and insights offered by the few may save us from dangerous mistakes; they may even lead us to new, previously undreamt-of horizons of service, where we might fulfill our fellowship's primary purpose more effectively than ever. For the sake of our fellowship, and for the sake of our members yet to come, our groups, service boards, and committees must always carefully consider all viewpoints in their decision-making processes. (Reprinted from our 9th Concept, from The Twelve Concepts booklet)

For consensus to work well, the process must be conducted in an environment which promotes trust, respect, and skill sharing. The following are principles which, when valued and respected, encourage and build consensus.

Trust

Foremost is the need for trust. Without some amount of trust, there will be no cooperation or nonviolent resolution to conflict. For trust to flourish, it is desirable for individuals to be willing to examine their attitudes and be open to new ideas. Acknowledgement and appreciation of personal and cultural differences promote trust. Neither approval nor friendships are necessary for a good working relationship. By developing trust, the process of consensus encourages the intellectual and emotional development of the individuals within a group.

Respect

It is everyone's responsibility to show respect to one another. People feel respected when everyone listens, when they are not interrupted, when their ideas are taken seriously. Respect for emotional as well as logical concerns promotes the kind of environment necessary for developing consensus.

Good Will

Always try to assume good will. Assume every statement and action is sincerely intended to benefit the group. Assume that each member understands the group's purpose and accepts the agenda as a contract.

Often, when we project our feelings and expectations onto others, we influence their actions. If we treat others as though they are trying to get attention, disrupt meetings, or pick fights, they will often fulfill our expectations. A resolution to conflict is more likely to occur if we act as though there will be one. This is especially true if someone is intentionally trying to cause trouble or who is emotionally unhealthy. Do not attack the person, but rather, assume good will and ask the person to explain to the group how that person's statements or actions are in the best interest of the group. It is also helpful to remember to separate the actor from the action. The group's work is the search for the best and most creative process, one which fosters a mutually satisfying resolution to any concern which may arise.

Unity of Purpose

Unity of purpose is a basic understanding about the goals and purpose of the group. Of course, there will be varying opinions on the best way to accomplish these goals. However, there must be a unifying base, a common starting point, which is recognized and accepted by all.

Conflict Resolution

The free flow of ideas, even among friends, inevitably leads to conflict. In this context, conflict is simply the expression of disagreement. Disagreement itself is neither good nor bad. Diverse viewpoints bring into focus and explore the strengths and weaknesses of attitudes, assumptions, and plans. Without conflict, one is less likely to think about and evaluate one's views and prejudices. There is no right decision, only the best one for the whole group. The task is to work together to discover which choice is most acceptable to all members.

Avoid blaming anyone for conflict. Blame is inherently violent. It attacks dignity and empowerment. It encourages people to feel guilty, defensive, and alienated. The group will lose its ability to resolve conflict. People will hide their true feelings to avoid being blamed for the conflict. The presence of conflict can create an occasion for growth. Learn to use it as a catalyst for discovering creative resolutions and for developing a better understanding of each other. With patience, anyone can learn to resolve conflict creatively, without defensiveness or guilt. Groups can learn to nurture and support their members in this effort by allowing creativity and experimentation. This process necessitates that the group continually evaluate and improve these skills.

Active Participation

Group members need to be present for the discussion part of the decision so your ideas can be shared, and you hear the other perspectives and ideas.

We all have an inalienable right to express our own best thoughts. We decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. Since consensus is a process of synthesis, not competition, all sincere comments are important and valuable. If ideas are put forth as the speaker's property and individuals are strongly attached to their opinions, consensus will be extremely difficult. Stubbornness, closed-mindedness, and possessiveness lead to defensive and argumentative behavior that disrupts the process. For active participation to occur, it is necessary to promote trust by creating an atmosphere in which every contribution is considered valuable. With encouragement, each person can develop knowledge and experience, a sense of responsibility and competency, and the ability to participate.

Patience

Consensus cannot be rushed. Often, it functions smoothly, producing effective, stable results. Sometimes, when difficult situations arise, consensus requires more time to allow for the creative interplay of ideas. During these times, patience is more advantageous than tense, urgent, or aggressive behavior. Consensus is possible as long as each individual acts patiently and respectfully.

How do you know you have consensus?

When all the participants give permission for the proposal to go ahead, consensus is reached. Typically the facilitator will ask the group for an affirmation of the proposal and at that time everyone signals their consent.

All concerns are important and need to be resolved.

The following is a description of different types of concerns and how they affect individuals and the group.

Concerns which can be addressed and resolved by making small changes in the proposal can be called minor concerns. The person supports the proposal, but has an idea for improvement.

When a person disagrees with the proposal in part, but consents to the overall idea, the person has a reservation. The person is not completely satisfied with the proposal, but is generally supportive. This kind of concern can usually be resolved through discussion. Sometimes, it is enough for the person to express the concern and feel that it was heard, without any actual resolution.

When a person does not agree with the proposal, the group allows that person to try and persuade it to see the wisdom of the disagreement. If the group is not persuaded or the disagreement cannot be resolved, the person might choose to stand aside and allow the group to go forward. The person and the group are agreeing to disagree, regarding each point of view with mutual respect. Occasionally, it is a concern which has no resolution; the person does not feel the need to block the decision, but wants to express the concern and lack of support for the proposal.

A blocking concern must be based on a generally recognized principle, not personal preference, or it must be essential to the entire group's well-being. Before a concern is considered to be blocking, the group must have already accepted the validity of the concern and a reasonable attempt must have been made to resolve it. If legitimate concerns remain unresolved and the person has not agreed to stand aside, consensus is blocked.

Standing aside

A common problem in consensus groups is where there is a values clash between personal and group values. Often personal values can be included in a solution that works for the group. Where it can't, the values are respected by allowing the individual to stand aside. When a concern has been fully discussed and cannot be resolved, it is appropriate for the facilitator to ask those persons with this concern if they are willing to stand aside; that is, acknowledge that the concern still exists, but allow the proposal to be adopted. Filibustering is not appropriate in Formal Consensus.

Blocking decisions

After the modification stage, if the final solution is not acceptable as being the best interest for the group, then it is the duty of the participants to not give permission to the group to move forward at this time. If the modification process is done well, blocking is almost never used. The facilitator should clarify with the blocker, how the group interests are not being served by moving ahead with the proposal.

One of the key elements here is that blocking is done for the best interests of the group, not to serve personal likes and dislikes. Remember, even if you disagree with a decision, you can give permission to the group to proceed in order for the group to learn things. Often a group must make decisions with out all the information needed or all issues resolved. Moving forward is sometimes the way to understand what will happen as you implement a decision.

Most important, the group should see those who are withholding consensus as doing so out of their highest understanding and beliefs. Next, the individual(s) who are holding the group from making a decision should also examine themselves closely to assure that they are not withholding consensus out of self-interest, bias, vengeance, or any other such feeling. A refusal to consent should be based on a very strong belief that the decision is wrong -- and that the dissenter(s) would be doing the group a great disservice by allowing the decision to go forward.

This is always one of those times when feelings can run high, and it is important for the group not to use pressure on those who differ. It is hard enough to feel that you are stopping the group from going forward, without having additional pressure exerted to go against your examined reasons and deeply felt understandings.

Typical problems groups have using consensus

People who miss the discussion but come in on the proposal

When people miss the discussion, they may bring up the same conversations and points that the rest of the group has already been through. If this occurs regularly, people may become resentful of those that don't participate in the discussions, or may even stop coming to meetings because they end up rehashing the same discussions over and over again. Many consensus groups do not allow those not present for the discussion stage to be part of the proposal and modification stages, or have special considerations for those that did not participate in the discussion. Participation in the full cycle of the consensus process is important for a successful consensus decision.

The meeting environment discourages contributions

If there is a lot of cross talking, or loud rebuttals, or sarcastic tones it will keep some people from sharing their ideas. In the worse cases people are personally insulted, belittled, or laughed at. It is unlikely in such an environment people would feel good about being part of the process and willingly contribute ideas that might add value but run counter to the ideas of others in the group. If there is a strong hierarchy in the group, it can affect people's willingness to bring up all the ideas, especially those that might run counter to the bosses opinions.

An individual inappropriately uses blocking

The group's interests are not being served by a block, for example a person blocks a decision from their own preferences or as a power play over the group. Or a person threatens to block even before the discussion phase is held. This is where the facilitator needs to help the group negotiate by defining what the real issue is. Often there are hidden issues unresolved which are driving the individual to block. In the final case, a majority vote can override an inappropriate use of blocking.

Your personal behavior has impacts on the group

Every person in a collaborative process affects the process. Think about how you impact the group. What assets do you bring? What liabilities? Think about how you might work to keep your liabilities in check as the group works together. How can you remind yourself not to do that behavior that causes problems?

Personality Style

Every person has a Personality style. In its simplest form you can examine whether you are task or feelings oriented. Do you want to get things done, or do you want to hear about how people feel about it? Maybe you don't know and so you might ask how others perceive you. How you relate and react to people that have opposite needs than you has a great impact on the groups work.

Hot buttons

Hot buttons are those things that get an instant angry response. They often come from events in our lives that shaped our values and are not often things we can control. What kinds of things make you mad? Remember, a skillful antagonist might be able to manipulate you by pushing your hot buttons to get you to react. Know them and be aware of your response when those issues come up.

Physical factors

When you are hungry do you get irritable? If you are tired do you have less patience than normal? If you have an injury or soreness that is hurting you, does it change how you react to others? You can defuse this often just by admitting it out loud to the group.

Emotional state

When something is causing you distress, you are in an abnormal emotional state and like the physical factors, and this may cause irregular behaviors. When you can do so, alert the group to your distress and warn them of potential consequences. A key element to making consensus work is personal humility. By recognizing the limits of your own experiences you open the way to learn new things.

Meeting Actions

There are several behaviors which have been shown to be helpful to many groups. It can be helpful to adopt these, and other helpful behaviors as group ground rules and post them to remind yourselves to follow them. A good facilitator can use such ground rules to intervene and help the group succeed.

Be a good listener

Listen carefully and ask for clarification, especially about why people think or feel as they do. Never interrupt. Ask questions to clarify what the issue is and why is it an issue.

Be solution centered

Don't just criticize; suggest solutions and ideas for solving problems. Be sure to state the problem as clearly as you can before trying to apply solutions.

Be concise

Think out what you are going to say before you say it and then be brief. Don't ramble; don't repeat what others have said. If you think the same as someone else who has already spoken, then simply say, "I agree with ___".

Be patient

Others may need more time to understand, or need more information. Consensus is NOT a fast decision making process. Be willing to let others have the time they need.

Take a dose of humility

The answer that suits your needs does not mean it's the best answer for everyone, or that what meets your needs meets the needs of others. Learn to say to yourself: I might be wrong. Be willing to learn what lessons the group can teach you, even if you are the expert.

Take a long term view

Many decisions and proposals are learning experiences for things you have not yet done. If it does not work, you can change it later. Try things out. Experiment. Be willing to try on new ideas and processes. This is an adventure to be explored.

Learn when to let go

Many things a group decides can be redone later. Don't get hung up on small details, let the decision go forward and then examine it later to see if your misgivings were justified or not.

Give the reasons behind your thinking

Whenever you state an opinion, you can add valuable information by giving others the reasons for your opinion. Be open to questions and comments about your opinions.

Be open to outcome

Look fairly and equally at all the pros and cons of all ideas. Don't come with "THE PLAN" come with "an idea". Then see where the group expands it and be open to the change. Don't own ideas; give them away to the group. Do not lobby your idea, encourage the group to look at all the pros and cons. Do not set unnecessary limits.

Exercises in Consensus Based Decision-Making

1.) Motion is brought up to have coffee at all ARSCNA meetings. There is an opposition (opposition wants tea). Maker explains intent and reason in detail. Opposition would still like tea, but agrees to stand aside and let idea proceed (agrees to disagree without being disagreeable).

2.) Motion is brought up to have coffee at all ARSCNA meetings. There is an opposition (opposition wants tea). Maker explains intent and reason in detail. Opposition would still like tea and offers a compromise to have both coffee and tea. Compromise accepted by body.

3.) Motion is brought up to have coffee at all ARSCNA meetings. There is an opposition (opposition wants soda). Maker explains intent and reason in detail. Opposition would still like soda and offers compromise for both coffee and soda. Maker of the motion is willing to agree with compromise if tea is also added into the compromise. The original opposition and maker agree to the compromise for coffee, tea, and soda at all meetings. After the maker and original opposition agree, there is a new opposition by 2 members (their objection is responsible use of funds). This new opposition will not agree to compromise, will not stand aside, and say they will block consensus (forcing this to go into standard parliamentary procedure).

Come up with other exercises from participants suggestions.

Consensus Procedure

1. Motion or item is presented
2. Does item receive 100% approval or rejection? If 100% approval motion passes (go to # 9), if 100% rejection motion fails (go to # 10), if item does not receive 100% in either go to # 3.
3. The Chair asks the maker to fully express the intent and what is hoped to be accomplished with the idea. The Chair asks if the additional information has changed anyone's opinion. If anyone's opinion has changed, is there now 100% approval? If so item passes (go to # 9). If no one's opinion has changed (or some opinions have changed, but the item does not receive 100% approval) the opposing individuals are asked to express their concerns and what it might take to reach a compromise (if any). Go to # 4.
4. The maker is asked if the compromise (if any) is acceptable. If so, the RCMs are asked if there is any further discussion needed. If not, the chair asks if there is any opposition. If 100% approval item passes (go to # 9), if not go to # 5.
5. If the originator cannot live with the compromise (or item did not receive 100% approval from # 4), the individual is asked to express concerns and what it might take to reach a compromise. If compromise is reached go to # 6. If compromise is not reached go to # 7.
6. Does item receive 100% approval? If yes item passes (go to # 9), if not go to # 7.
7. If a compromise cannot be reached (or item does not receive 100% approval from #6), and 2 or less RCMs are opposed, the Chair asks if they are willing to concede (or stand aside) and allow the decision to move forward. If the opposition agrees to stand aside the item passes (go to # 9). If the opposition does not stand aside, or the item was opposed by more than 2 people, the item needs to be acted on by parliamentary procedure and called to a vote (go to # 8).
8. Item is voted on using a paper ballot (after any discussion). If item receives 2/3rds, or more, of the *participating* votes it passes (go to # 9) if it receives less than 2/3rds it fails (go to # 10).
9. Item has passed record results in minutes.
10. Item has failed record the results in minutes.

Flowchart For Consensus Based Decision-making

