

A Checklist for the Consensus Process

These are just some of the many ways to conduct a meeting using the consensus process. Roles should be carried out by everyone as needed — not just the person specially designated.

Basic Procedure

Before the meeting (or at previous meeting):

- Choose facilitator(s)
- Gather agenda items
- Determine presenter/initiator for each item
- Determine item type: announcement, report, discussion, decision
- Bring materials/supplies needed

At the meeting:

- Connect (game, song, ritual, etc.)
- Check-in/excitement-sharing
- Agenda review: agree on order and time
- Choose notetaker, timekeeper, vibeswatcher
- Step through the agenda
- Set next meeting
- Evaluation (good, bad, better)
- Closing (game, song, ritual, etc.)

The Flow of a Cooperative Decision-Making Process

- Issue raised — what is the problem?
- Clarify problem — put it in context
- Discuss, bring out a diversity of ideas, concerns, and perspectives — look at possible solutions and the problems with those solutions
- Encourage heartfelt dissent and challenge
- Note agreements and disagreements and the underlying reasons for them — discuss those underlying reasons
- Synthesize proposed ideas/solutions or come up with totally new ideas in the supportive atmosphere of the meeting (find a “third way”)
- Evaluate the different ideas until one idea seems right for the group
- Establish how the decision will be implemented
- Make sure there are no loose ends
- Restate the decision for the notetaker (including implementation)

Discussion/Problem-Solving Tools

- Brainstorms
- Go around the circle
- Small-group discussion (3-7 people)
- Advantages/disadvantages chart
- Visual aids
- Visible notes
- Goals-/priorities-setting techniques
- Challenges/devil’s advocate questions

Process/Empowerment Tools

- Participation equalizers (pebbles, etc.)
- Active listening in pairs
- Support groups/caucuses
- Feelings sharing
- Fishbowls
- Role plays

Typical Tasks of Facilitator(s)

- Helps formulate agenda
- Helps establish a hopeful, upbeat, and safe atmosphere
- Helps group work through decisions:
 - Asks for clarification
 - Summarizes and sorts discussion — lists threads of thought, agreements, and disagreements
 - Helps focus and order discussion topics
 - Brings out all viewpoints
 - Restates final decisions
- Encourages equal participation
 - Draws out quiet people
 - Asks windy speakers to be brief
- Encourages everyone to perform leadership tasks
- Calls on speakers
- Stays neutral while facilitating

Typical Tasks of a Vibeswatcher (“Caretaker”)

- Watches the **process** of the meeting
- Notices underlying feelings from tone of voice and body language, points out tension and weariness, recommends changes
- Stops bad process (domineering, guilt-tripping, interrupting, put-downs, bulldozing, defensiveness, space-outs, etc.)
- Helps resolve conflicts
- Helps work out negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, hopelessness)
- Suggests tools to improve meetings
- Helps create a safe, accepting tone
- Deals with outside distractions

Stress-Reduction Techniques

- Stretch breaks/cooperative games
- Singing
- Humor
- Affirmations
- Feelings sharing
- Silence (mediation, prayer)
- Calm voice
- Eye contact
- Breathing (deep)
- Back rubs

Conflict Resolution Tools

- Appreciations/affirmations
- Active listening
- I-messages
- Restating other’s viewpoint
- Six-step problem solving technique
- Support groups
- Venting emotions somewhere else
- Gripe sessions
- Resentment sharing
- Fishbowls