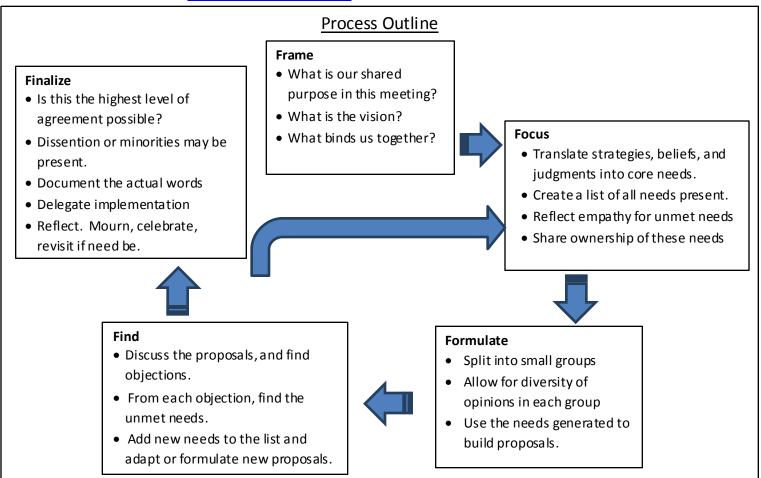# Overview of Consensus

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Readiness Checklist

- ☐ Guiding values
- ☐ Relevant background information
- ☐ Sufficient time
- ☐ Coffee (or other creature comforts)
- ☐ Curiosity, openness to the process
- ☐ Trust between parties
- ☐ Freedom from pre-constructed arguments
- ☐ Kindness
- ☐ Patience when any of the above are not initially present.

Process Outline

Frame
- What is our shared purpose in this meeting?
- What is the vision?
- What binds us together?

Focus
- Translate strategies, beliefs, and judgments into core needs.
- Create a list of all needs present.
- Reflect empathy for unmet needs
- Share ownership of these needs

Finalize
- Is this the highest level of agreement possible?
- Dissention or minorities may be present.
- Document the actual words
- Delegate implementation
- Reflect. Mourn, celebrate, revisit if need be.

Find
- Discuss the proposals, and find objections.
- From each objection, find the unmet needs.
- Add new needs to the list and adapt or formulate new proposals.

Formulate
- Split into small groups
- Allow for diversity of opinions in each group
- Use the needs generated to build proposals.

Toolkit for Unsticking

- Break the decision into smaller pieces.
- Return to empathy. Allow for sadness, regret, remorse, frustration, to be fully and understood in multiple ways before problem solving.
- Identify the assumptions, needs, and beliefs underlying the issue. Consider if a deeper problem exists. Find the heart of the matter.
- Consider the meaning of our words. Probe behind vague language, bucket words, or should statements.

- Take a short break. Enjoy an energizing activity or a cup of tea.
- Take a longer break: hours, days, perhaps weeks
- Harness willingness. What might you support to meet the needs of others?
- Play the Believing and Doubting Game
- Bring in a facilitator
- Separate observations (what a video camera could record) from our evaluations, judgments, or assumption behind them.

Consensus Cheat Sheet

Readiness checklist for strong likelihood of success with consensus decision making:	Checklist for low likelihood of success.
□ Mindset of collaboration, not concession, competition, or either/or □ Curiosity and openness to process – don't know where it will go, as it hasn't happened yet. □ Holding the process tightly and the outcome loosely. □ Guiding values of the group are established □ Humor □ Kindness □ Emotional Intelligence □ Patience and tolerance when some of the above are not initially present.	□ Ideological lines are of primary importance--US Congress often holds this line □ Games / trading are played, where there is give and take, or tit for tat □ Anyone part of the decision is certain they have access to the Truth □ You've got an argument you're going in with □ Belief that after a x amount of time (multiple sittings), consensus "should" be reachable. □ Extreme dichotomous beliefs are the central question (e.g., pro life / pro choice) □ A binding vote is taken □ Members hold personal conflicts with foundational agreements or values of the group and work to change decisions based on those personal values/beliefs, or make them sticky, as a result. □ Money is trading hands in a Zero Sum Game. □ Unconnected organizations or people who will have little or no relationship later on. □ A necessary, foundational philosophy is not established. □ Belief that mistakes will not be made along the way.

Additional useful mindsets while in consensus process
- o Creativity / innovation
- o Progress is possible
- o Believing and Doubting Game
- o Asking for 100%
- o 10 / 10 / 10. Consider the consequences and outcomes of your various options in 10 minutes, 10 months, and 10 years.
- o We is primary, and I is not relevant
- o Break it up (create sets of smaller, more manageable decisions)
- o No free lunch – rarely is a solution possible without a weighting or prioritization of needs
- o Meditation
- o Stories of challenging and complex consensus decisions in the past ("Chicken Soup for the Soul") that resolved

Criteria for consulting the whole group:
- The decision affects a majority of people in the organization now and into the future.
- The decision affects the vision, mission, and direction of the organization.
- In not acting on a decision, it is readily imaginable that staff, clients, or shareholders would be hampered in their experience of the vision and mission.
- The need of our organization to have consensus on this decision outweighs other group needs for our time.
- The given individual(s) with designated responsibility for a process/decision is unlikely to make a wise choice for the community.

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Consensus Cheat Sheet

Processes that don't require consensus:

- Quick decisions safely considered within the bounds of the group's values. Time is of the essence. Often executed by people with a relevant role, but not necessarily if immediacy is critical.
- Minor decisions safely considered within the bounds of the group's values. There are thousands of decisions that given individuals make, believing the large group to be either uninterested in or already considered within existing philosophical/value understandings. Judgment calls without major weight.
- Role/function decisions made by people given the authority to make those decisions by the group. That person may feel that the decision in their hand at the moment doesn't fit their granted power, or they may want a second opinion. This is not appropriate for an action that has deep and long-lasting effects. Role decisions are trusted because the person in the role is known (or likely) to make wise decisions most of the time. If the person in the role is not trusted, support may be offered, the role's domains altered, or a consensus process begins around role shifting.
- Open discussion. Consensus is not to be mistaken for passionate and interesting discussions about an issue between a couple/few people. A GREAT many quandaries that require exploration and a decision can take place in less formal and in a more ad-hoc manner. A seeming impasse may require another perspective.

Minorities in Consensus – Three Levels

When we hold space for folks to disagree, but allow the decision to pass, we let each person weigh their beliefs along with the group desire to make a decision. Minorities can then exist on three levels.

- Declare reservation – the softest form of disagreement, but allowance. The dissenter(s) wishes to be heard and considered, but if the group is not swayed, s/he agrees to allow the proposal to move forward, having been heard. The act is made in peaceful disagreement, but allowance. The decision does not live on emotionally in the dissenter – there is non-attachment, release.
- Stand aside – an individual(s) has a serious disagreement with the proposal, but is willing to let the motion pass. Modifications are often made in such cases. In standing aside, the individual is also agreeing to let the emotions and consequences pass, so there isn't a "grudge" or "disgruntlement." The act is made in peaceful disagreement, but allowance.

  > In both of the above positions, the person also agrees to support the proposal by their *actions* as well, since the community has decided it is the path forward. Regardless of the outcome, I am they and they are I.

- Block – the decision may not go forward. A guiding principle with blocks is that a given individual may use four of them in his or her physical lifetime. It is a stand of last resort, reflecting a perceived blind sightedness on the part of the larger group in regard to a **shared, community value** of considerable weight and pervasive and extensive effects. Personal values are not relevant. Strong emotions may be present, yet the passion contains no hostility, and reasoned dialogue prevails. Significant harm to the organization or individuals must be perceived. The blocker holds enormous responsibility to create understanding and solutions; they are not sticks holding the process up, but rather wands creating movement.

Consensus Cheat Sheet

It's
The Game of ~~Life~~ Consensus!

I want to change something. → **N** → *I might make a sandwich instead...*

Y ↓

Is personal benefit the underlying motive? → **Y** → *Needs shifting*

Ask for your 100%

N ↓

Does it question a core value or standing agrement? → **N**

Y ↓

Does it have a significant, long term impact for many? → **N**

Y ↓

Gather more! → Do you have enough supporting information? → **N**

N ↓ **Y**

Send out a call for all interested parties to join a committee.

HEY GUYS!

Does the call find more than ~12 interested parties? → **Y**

N ↓

Follow large group process.

This way!

A once a year event. ①

Table for symposium. ← **Y** ← Set a time for a large group discussion. Does the urgency out weigh the time needed during the summer?

Y ↓

Meet on Saturday or Sunday as a large group.

Talking!

↓

Whole large group meets and gives input with limited discussion. Small groups form to make proposals. Multiple, nested or overlapping groups may visit.

Progress!

Follow small group process.

This way!

Group discusses until all points are on the table, all needs (group + individual) are understood. Then they strive for consensus.
See Step IV

Progress! ↓

Reach consensus? ← Use an un-stickying technque. *See Step V*

Y ↓ **N**

That's great! Lets move forwards!

Y ↓

Present proposal to group via a posted notice and email. Gather commentary.

Presenting! ↓

Strong dissenters? → **Y** → Dissenters join group.

N ↓

Significant modifications or new points raised by community? → **Y**

N ↓

Assign person to impliment change. Consensus reached!

Do I own the process? → **Y** → Do I want input? → **N** → *Change it!*

N ↓ ↓ **Y**

Testing style leadership.

Seek the person who does. Do they feel ok making a decision with you? → **Y** → Do you want input? → **N** → *Change it!*

N ↓ ↓ **Y**

Testing style leadership.

Consult relevent parties and seek a small group consensus.
See Step IV
This does not need large group approval.

↓

Change!

① In this area, the decision is owned by a person, not the whole organization. That person may seek group input or consensus with an affected party.

Progress!