

Collaborative Approaches to Decision-Making

Consensus: The consensus process allows the entire group to be heard and to participate in decision-making. The goal of consensus decision-making is to find common ground, probing issues until everyone's opinions are voiced and understood by the group. Discussions leading to consensus aim to bring the group to mutual agreement by addressing all concerns. Consensus does not require unanimity. Rather, everyone must agree they can "live with" the decision. Though it can take longer than other decision-making methods, consensus fosters creativity, cooperation and commitment to final decisions. There are no "winners" and "losers" in this process, as discussion continues until consensus is achieved. Discussion is closed by restating agreements made and "next steps" in implementing decisions made.

Democratic: Options are discussed fully so that members are informed as to the decision's consequences. The important ground rule here is that the "losing" side agrees to support the decision, even though it was not their choice. Decisions are made by majority vote.

Straw polling: Straw polling entails asking for a show of hands (e.g., thumbs up or down) to see how the group feels about a particular issue. It is a quick check that can save a great deal of time. Silent hand signals can be an invaluable source of feedback for a facilitator working with a large group.

Voting: Voting is a decision-making method that seems best suited to large groups. To avoid alienating large minorities, you might decide a motion will only succeed with a two-thirds (or more) majority. Some partnerships limit voting to people who have come to three or more consecutive meetings to prevent stacked meetings and to encourage familiarity with the issues being decided. Alternatively, voting can be combined with consensus. Some groups institute time limits on discussion and move to voting if consensus cannot be reached.

Delegation: The partnership may agree to delegate certain decisions to small groups, committees, or an individual. A small group may have the specialized knowledge, skills, or resources required to make certain decisions. When delegating decision-making, the group must clarify any constraints on the authority to act, and institute mechanisms for reporting back to the large group.

Source: Center for Collaborative Planning, www.connectccp.org