

# Board Decision-Making

## Decision by Consensus

The following is an overview of how the Board will conduct its meetings: Our guiding principles shall be:

- All members will contribute equally;
- All contributions will be respected;
- Progress toward high quality decision-making will be facilitated;
- Decisions will be made by consensus.

Generally, the process will be conducted as follows:

- Consensus shall be defined as “no Board member objects to the proposal.”
- Decisions made by the Board will be clearly identified in the minutes of its meetings. The precise wording of the *decision-making proposal* and the outcome (consensus reached or the closing option) will be recorded.
- There is no correct form for a *decision-making proposal*; rather, the requirement is for clarity of meaning. Members are free to use the phrase, “I move...” or whatever is comfortable and familiar in making a *decision-making proposal*.
- There will be no requirement for a “mover” and/or a “seconded” to a *decision-making proposal*.
- Minutes will read as “agreed to by consensus” (ABC) rather than “Moved/Seconded/Carried” (as if by vote).
- The minutes will not record the name of the mover/“proposer”. This practice recognizes that once the group agrees to discuss a proposal, it is the Board, not the originator, who “owns” the *decision-making*

- proposal.*
- In general, members should speak once to *decision-making proposal* or at least not speak a second time until all other members have had an opportunity to contribute. During the discussion the Chair will “poll” each member for their position on the proposal, ensuring all have an equal opportunity to comment.
  - If reaching a consensus proves challenging, the Chair should place alternatives before the Board:
    - referring the issue (to a committee, to a subsequent meeting, to a small group to address during a break, etc.);
    - postponing the decision to a certain time;
    - withdrawing the proposal.

This following information describes the CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING process:

**Consensus decision-making** is a group decision-making process that not only seeks the agreement of most participants, but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections. Consensus is usually defined as meaning both general agreement, and the process of getting to such agreement. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned primarily with that process.

**Objectives:** As a decision-making process, consensus decision-making aims to be:

- **Inclusive:** As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.
- **Participatory:** The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers.
- **Cooperative:** Participants in an effective consensus

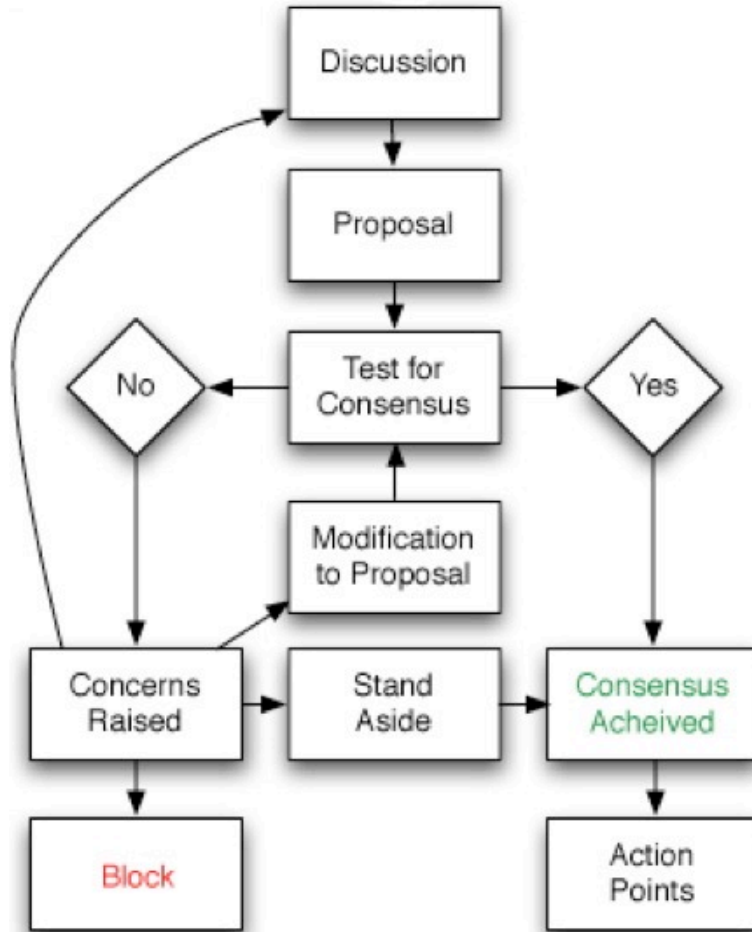
process should strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than opt to pursue a majority opinion, potentially to the detriment of a minority

- **Egalitarian:** All members of a consensus decision-making body should be afforded, as much as possible, equal input into the process. All members have the opportunity to table, amend and veto or "block" proposals.
- **Solution-oriented:** An effective consensus decision-making body strives to emphasize common agreement over differences and reach effective decisions using compromise and other techniques to avoid or resolve mutually-exclusive positions within the group.

**Process:** Since the consensus decision-making process is not as formalized as others (e.g. Roberts Rules of Order), the practical details of its implementation vary from group to group.

However, there is a core set of procedures that is common to most implementations of consensus decision-making. Once an agenda for discussion has been set and, optionally, the ground rules for the meeting have been agreed upon, each item of the agenda is addressed in turn.

Typically, each decision arising from an agenda item follows through a simple structure: (see diagram, next page)



*Flowchart of basic consensus decision-making process.*

**Discussion of the item:** The item is discussed with the goal of identifying opinions and information on the topic at hand. The general direction of the group and potential proposals for action are often identified during the discussion.

**Formation of a proposal:** Based on the discussion a formal decision proposal on the issue is presented to the group.

**Call for consensus:** The facilitator of the decision-making body calls for consensus on the proposal. Each member of the group usually must actively state their agreement with the proposal, often by using a hand gesture, to avoid the

group interpreting silence or inaction as agreement.

**Identification and addressing of concerns:** If consensus is not achieved, each dissenter presents his or her concerns on the proposal, potentially starting another round of discussion to address or clarify the concern.

**Modification of the proposal:** The proposal is amended, re-phrased or “ridered” (added to the proposal) in an attempt to address the concerns of the decision-makers. The process then returns to the call for consensus and the cycle is repeated until a satisfactory decision is made.

**Dissent:** Although the consensus decision-making process should, ideally, identify and address concerns and reservations early, proposals do not always garner full consensus from the decision-making body. When a call for consensus on a motion is made, a dissenting delegate has one of three options:

- **Declare reservations:** Group members who are willing to let a motion pass but desire to register their concerns with the group may choose "declare reservations." If there are significant reservations about a motion, the decision-making body may choose to modify or re-word the proposal.
- **Stand aside:** A "stand aside" may be registered by a group member who has a "serious personal disagreement" with a proposal, but is willing to let the motion pass. Although stand asides do not halt a motion, it is often regarded as a strong "nay vote" and the concerns of group members standing aside are usually addressed by modifications to the proposal. Stand asides may also be registered by users who feel they are incapable of adequately understanding or participating in the proposal.

- **Block:** Any group member may "block" a proposal. In most models, a single block is sufficient to stop a proposal, although some measures of consensus may require more than one block. Blocks are generally considered to be an extreme measure, only used when a member feels a proposal "endanger[s] the organization or its participants, or violate[s] the mission of the organization" (i.e., a principled objection). In some consensus models, a group member opposing a proposal must work with its proponents to find a solution that will work for everyone.