

Consensus Based Decision Making

A working definition of Consensus

Consensus is a process by which a common mind of the meeting is sought about the wisest way to move forward on a particular issue at the time. It is derived from the Latin words con meaning “with” or “together with” and sentir meaning to “think” or “feel”. So, “*consensus*” means to “*think or feel together.*”

Consensus Based Decision Making is:

1. A cooperative process for making decisions in which everyone consents to the decisions of the group
 - Not everyone's first preference necessarily, but true consent
 - Decisions should reflect the integrated will of the whole group
 - Preserves the interests and integrity of all participants
- A problem-solving orientation for people who wish to work together
 - Not a process for determining whose ideas are best, but searching together for the best solution for the group
 - A questioning process, not the “okey-doke”
 - The decision is in this room — our job is to find it
 - Have respect and enjoy creative conflict

Below is a diagram of the flow of conversation and decision making: **Error! Objects cannot be created from editing field codes.**

Discussion of the item: Discussion takes place here as well as in your home groups or over coffee. 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. It should be written down and projected so we're clear on what is being discussed.

Test for consensus/Straw poll: Thumbs up or down – to find degree of support and concerns of those opposed.

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 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.

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 or raising a colored card, to avoid the group from interpreting silence or inaction as agreement. The decision reached by consensus takes into account the insights of all members. The process ensures that issues are fully aired and that all members feel they have been adequately heard. Decisions are taken not simply because one more than 50% of members are in favor of a proposal, but because all agree to a way forward.

Some may feel that it's not necessarily their first option, but ALL can support it and commit themselves not to undermine the decision.

TRUE CONSENSUS is not the same as unanimity. We must be careful to recognize that real consensus arises out of real community, and often only through real tension as people express their insights with passion and integrity, and yet with respect for really hearing others' points of view.

Ideally,

- Concerns and reservations will be identified and addressed through the consensus based decision-making process.
- When the call for consensus on a proposal is made, you should **ASSENT** if you support the proposal, all things considered.
- Assent does not indicate that you may agree with every aspect of a proposal, but that you...
 - Have heard the discussion
 - Have had a chance to participate in the process of finalizing the proposal
 - Are prepared to support the final proposal

Assent: This means that you support the proposal, all things considered. It may not mean that you are in agreement with every aspect, but that you have heard the discussion, have had a chance to participate in the process of finalizing the proposal, and are prepared to support the final proposal. Assent is signified by raising your Area's table card and remaining silent.

There are three degrees of *dissent*:

- Assent with Reservations – I have some concerns that need to be heard.
- Stand Aside – I have concerns but will not stop the group from moving forward.
- Block – I have a serious issue with the proposal based on traditions or concepts and will not give my consent.

Assent with Reservations: Group members who are willing to let a motion pass but desire to register their concerns with the group may choose "assent with reservations." If there are significant reservations about a motion, the decision-making body may choose to modify or reword the proposal. This option is not materially different from the assent option but is a way of giving addicts a place to stand when they do not need to object more strongly, but they want to note that they have reservations. Assent with Reservations by raising your hand and, when called on by the facilitator, simply saying "Assent with Reservations." The assumption is that the reservations have been heard already, and you are simply noting that you can support the proposal and continue to have these reservations.

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 proposal pass. Although stand asides do not halt a proposal, 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. Should there be a sizable number of Stand Asides (20% of the groups present); this will indicate a consensus too weak to adopt the proposal. The proposal is then either dropped or delegated to the maker of the proposal or an Ad Hoc Committee for reworking.

Block: Given that a proposal can be defeated by a sufficient number of Stand Asides, the Block should be an extremely rare step taken only when a participant honestly believes that one of the Traditions or Concepts is directly violated by this proposal or that some very fundamental moral position of the participant is violated. An addict who blocks must be able to articulate which Tradition or Concept or Spiritual principle fundamental to NA is violated by the proposal. Unanimity minus 20% gives the ability of GSR's to actively block a decision.