

COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

This is an experiential activity that starts with making a simple decision as a group in order to reflect on decision-making in general. It provides an opportunity for a group to decide how it will make important decisions together. It ends with a decision made about how the group will decide things collectively in the future.

PURPOSE

To agree on how and when decisions should be made together.

OUTCOMES

Clear understanding about why decisions should be made collectively.

An agreed upon process for making decisions and for what to do when collective decision-making is challenging.

TIME

10-30 minutes

MATERIALS

None

SOURCE

Written by Partners for Collaborative Change, loosely based on a process developed by Quakers.

PREPARATION

Decide on a low-stakes decision to use, such as what snacks you will bring for the next session.

PROCESS

1. Tell the group that they will be deciding together what snacks we will have at the next session. To start the discussion about this, ask:

- a. What are factors that we should think about when making this decision?
- b. Who should be part of making the decision?
- c. Do we have enough information to make a decision at this time?
- d. What do we do if we disagree?
- e. What happens if everyone agrees, except one person?

2. Next try to reach consensus about the snacks. To do this:

- a. Request that someone make a proposal for what snacks to bring, based on the previous discussion.
- b. Check to see how people feel about this proposal. You can ask for people to show their thumbs up for support, down for strong opposition, or thumbs to the side to indicate that they have an issue with the proposal, but they won't block it. You can also use a spectrum for more complicated decisions as described below.
- c. Next, one by one ask for each person in a circle with a thumb to the side or down to share what their concern is, and ask the original proposer (or someone else) to make a new proposal that includes all of the concerns that were expressed.

- d. Check again (repeat steps B & C) until everyone either agrees, or is not opposed.
- e. If it seems that everyone does agree, rename the proposal and ask everyone again to affirm their agreement. Write this decision on flipchart paper so that it is very clear.

3. Now that you've made a decision about your snacks, talk about the different types of decision making.

- a. Consensus: everyone agrees
- b. Two-Thirds Consensus: We attempt to reach consensus, but then go to a two thirds vote if impossible
- c. Voting in which the majority wins
- d. One person decides

4. Using the same process as before, make a consensus decision about what kind of decision-making process the group will use for decisions that affect everyone.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Different types of decisions may require different types of decision making. For the really important decisions that impact the whole group and the whole project, we recommend consensus. A strong principle of Community Driven Planning is that the people who are impacted by a decision should be at the decision-making table. This applies within the group too. If someone is left out of deciding the research goal for example, they may lose interest in the project, and the whole group will likely be impacted by their disinterest or absence.

Quick Guide to Reaching Consensus:

1. Discuss the decision and all of the information that people will need to have in order to make an informed decision
2. Check that this is the right time and the right group of people to make this decision
3. Develop a proposal that synthesizes people's ideas
4. Check or test for consensus. Using thumbs, hands or a spectrum to learn who is not 100% on board, and hear their concerns and ask for changes
5. Make a new proposal that synthesizes all of the new information that was just shared
6. Check or test for consensus again
7. Repeat until there is no more opposition
8. Write up the decision clearly for all to see

VARIATIONS

When a decision can't be reached, use a Spectrum.

1. Show visibly the two ends of the spectrum and the invisible line along which people will place themselves.
2. Say, "Move to this side of the room if you are 100% agreed with this proposal, if you are 100% opposed, move to that side of the room (point) and if you're somewhere in between go
3. where feels right." Make sure to say, "Be wherever is true for you, there are no right or wrong answers."
4. Ask, "Does anyone want to share why they are where they are?"
5. Adjust the original proposal to address concerns shared, and re-state.
6. Repeat this process until everyone is on the agree side.

