

FORMAL CONSENSUS DECISIONMAKING

Decisionmaking: There are many ways to make decisions. Methods of decisionmaking can be seen on a continuum with one person having total authority on one end to everyone sharing power and responsibility on the other.

Formal Consensus: Formal Consensus has a clearly defined structure. It requires a commitment to active cooperation, disciplined speaking and listening, and respect for the contributions of every member. Likewise, every person has the responsibility to actively participate as a creative individual within the structure.

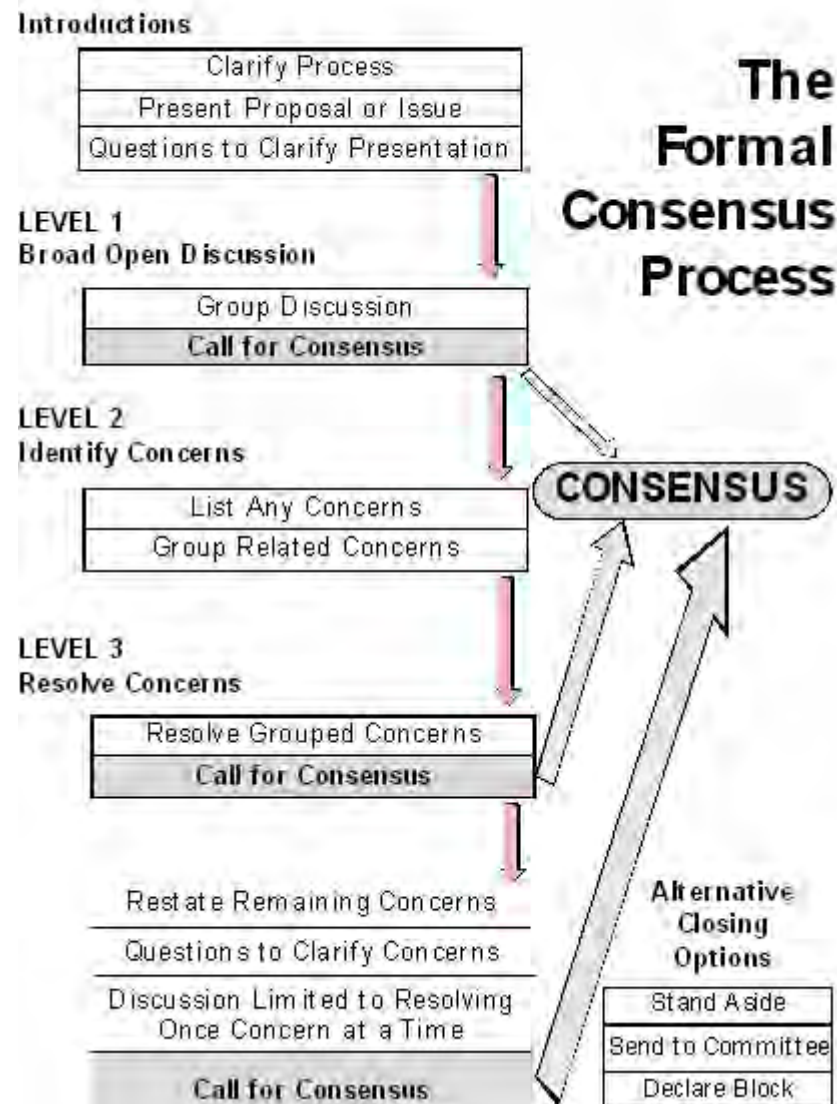
Conflict: Conflict is usually viewed as an impediment to reaching agreements and disruptive to peaceful relationships. Formal Consensus works best in an atmosphere in which conflict, or differing opinions about proposals, is encouraged, supported, and resolved cooperatively with respect, nonviolence, and creativity.

Cooperation: Consensus creates a cooperative dynamic rather than a competitive one. Everyone works together to make it the best possible decision for the group. Any concerns are raised and resolved until all voices are heard. Since proposals are not the property of the presenter, a solution can be created more cooperatively.

Proposals: In the Formal Consensus process, only proposals which intend to accomplish the common purpose are considered. During discussion of a proposal, everyone works to improve the proposal to make it the best decision for the group.

Call for Consensus: The facilitator asks, “*Are there any unresolved concerns?*” or “*Are there any concerns remaining?*” Note that the question is not, “Is there consensus?” or “Does everyone agree?”

Concern: All concerns are important and need to be resolved. It is not appropriate for a person to come to a meeting planning to block a proposal, or, during discussion, to express their concerns as *major objections* or *blocking concerns*. A concern must be based upon the principles of the group to justify a block to consensus.



Formal Consensus Decision-Making Summary

1. Present proposal

- Person with knowledge about the proposal presents the proposal, briefly summarizing what's in the proposal and how the proposal came to be.

2. Facilitator asks clarifying questions about the proposal

- Ensure people understand the proposal before people express opinions.
- Once there are no more clarifying questions, indicated by silence, facilitator moves to Level 1.

3. Level 1, broad, open discussion

- Facilitator asks for "Supports" and "Concerns" about the proposal.
- Supports and Concerns are captured so all can see opinions.
- Supports and Concerns should also be expressed against organization's mission:
 - "I support the proposal, because it supports the mission by ..."
 - "I have concerns about the proposal, because it conflicts with the mission by ..."

4. Call for consensus

- After all supports and concerns are shared, facilitator asks, "Are there any concerns that need to be resolved at this time in order to give consent to the proposal?"
- If none, proposal is approved by consensus.
- If there are concerns that need to be resolved, then move to Level 2.

5. Level 2, clarify the concerns that need to be resolved

- Facilitator helps group focus only on the concerns that need to be resolved.
- Once the group is clear about what needs to be resolved, then move to Level 3.

6. Level 3, group works together to amend proposal to resolve concerns

- Group works together to amend original proposal to address unresolved concerns from Level 2 discussion
- Facilitator surfaces concerns with amended proposal until all concerns that need to be resolved at this time are resolved.
- When there are no remaining unresolved concerns, proposal is approved by consensus.
