



Consensus-Decision Making Process

Consensus is...

- A proposal acceptable enough that all members can “live with it.”
- When all members agree to support it.

Consensus is not ...

- A unanimous vote—consensus may not represent everyone’s first priorities.
- A majority vote—only the majority gets something, the rest “lose,” which is not what consensus is all about.
- When everyone is totally satisfied.

Consensus requires...

- Time. It takes longer than a majority vote!
- Active participation of all group members.
- Skills in communication, listening, conflict resolution, discussion, facilitation.
- Creative thinking and open-mindedness.

One method for reaching consensus is called the **Consensus Workshop**. Adapted from The Consensus Workshop of The Technology of Participation, Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA).

Steps:

1. **Set a context:** Post a single, open-ended focus question.
2. **Brainstorm in layers:** Start with silent individual brainstorming, and then ask participants to select their personal top three to share in a small group. Ask small groups to agree on a specified number of distinct ideas to print clearly onto large cards, one idea per card. Invite the small groups to share their answers with the whole group by gradually calling for the cards.



3. **Cluster ideas:** When there are about 15 cards on the wall, ask the group to create pairs of cards with similar intent. Move cards with similar ideas together, first in pairs, then in larger groupings, or clusters. Ask each small group to hand up additional cards, a few at a time, until you have all the cards from all the groups. Make note of repetitions with a check mark, but do not re-post.
4. **Name the clusters:** After all the cards are placed on the wall in clusters or columns, give each cluster a 3–5 word title that answers the focus question.
5. **Confirm the resolve:** After naming all the clusters, review the titles to ensure clarity. Discuss the overall impact the ideas will have, and confirm that they represent the consensus of the whole group.
6. **Gain commitment:** List the immediate next steps.