

Summary of the Consensus Process

“Consensus is like a natural forest. Some things die, but nothing goes to waste.” — Bea Briggs

➔ Definition:

A group decision-making process in which all members of a group present in a meeting must agree on a decision before action is taken.

It is not a contest between those who support or oppose a proposal, but a process of using people’s insights, concerns and creative ideas to modify the proposal until everyone can support it.

“The intention is to cooperatively resolve all concerns and conflicts surrounding a proposal so that everyone can support the decision.” —Bea Briggs, *Introduction to Consensus*

➔ Core Belief: “Everyone has a piece of the truth.” — Quakers

➔ Steps:

- (1) Proposals are introduced, discussed, and revised as necessary before reaching the point of decision.
- (2) No votes are taken. Group participants have three decision-making options:
 - 🗳️ *Consent.* You support the proposal; you can live with it.
 - 🗳️ *Block.* You don’t support the proposal & must stop the group from adopting it.
 - 🗳️ *Stand Aside.* You personally don’t like the proposal but don’t want to stop it.
- (3) If consensus is reached the proposal passes. If not, no action is taken.

No significant proposals are introduced, discussed, and decided in one meeting; it takes at least two or more meetings for significant proposals.

➔ Three Requirements:

- (1) The group has a **common Mission & Purpose**
- (2) Group members have **equal access to power:** i.e., one isn’t the landlord or boss and the rest tenants or employees.
- (3) The **group is trained** in consensus. (*Ideally a two-day training.*)

➔ Five Essential Elements:

In order for the consensus process to work, five essential elements must be in place:

- (1) A willingness to share power
- (2) Informed commitment to the consensus process
- (3) A common purpose
- (4) Strong agendas
- (5) Effective facilitation

— Bea Briggs, *Introduction to Consensus*

➔ Underlying Values:

Respect for others	Honesty/openness
Goodwill towards others	Democracy/shared power/egalitarianism
Trust in life, trust in others	Diversity
Cooperation with others	Inclusivity
Nonviolence	Taking responsibility for the group’s actions

➔ **Characteristics and Skills Needed:**

- 🕒 Patience
- 🕒 Trust
- 🕒 Willingness to listen to and understand others; to be open to others
- 🕒 Willingness to let go of personal attachments in the best interest of the group
- 🕒 Disciplined speaking (focused, not rambling)

➔ **Characteristics and Skills Needed:** *(continued)*

- 🕒 Adequate preparation before the meeting
- 🕒 Active participation in the meeting
- 🕒 Creativity, problem-solving
- 🕒 Willingness to experiment

➔ **Basic Principles:**

(1) **Cooperation is the basis:** *We all get more of what we want when we cooperate.*

- 🕒 Consensus is for people who are trying to work together and who commit to honestly trying to cooperate with each other.
- 🕒 Encourages lifting everyone up to their highest potential.
- 🕒 Skills necessary for consensus are also necessary for good relationships.

(2) **Problem-Solving Orientation:**

- 🕒 Not a process for determining whose ideas are best, but searching together for the best solution for the group. "The decision is in this room — our job is to find it."
- 🕒 Consensus is a questioning process, more than an affirming process
- 🕒 Goal is to thrash out an issue until a good solution is found, rather than to make everyone feel good by all agreeing.
- 🕒 Craft a creative solution so that the most number of people get the most of what they most want.

(3) **Consensus seeks to synthesize the wisdom of the group.**

- 🕒 Unity, consent. Not like a unanimous vote; not necessarily everyone's 1st choice.
- 🕒 Sense of the meeting — essence is something you can support or are willing to let go forward: "I can live with it."

➔ **Three Stages:**

- (1) Introduction of a proposal
- (2) Discussion (and potential modification) of a proposal
- (3) Decision

➔ **Components of a Consensus Meeting:**

- (1) Agenda
- (2) Roles *(See below.)*
- (3) Proposals
- (4) Three decision options
- (5) Evaluation

There can also be reports, announcements, and general discussions of issues.

➔ **Essential Roles:**

- 🕒 Agenda Planner(s)
- 🕒 Facilitator
- 🕒 Minute taker
- 🕒 Timekeeper
- 🕒 Sponsors of Agenda Items

➔ **Optional Roles:**

- 🕒 *Scribe(s)*
- 🕒 *Doorkeeper(s)*
- 🕒 *Vibeswatcher(s)*
- 🕒 *Stacker*

➔ **Reasons to Use Consensus Instead of Majority-Rule Voting:**

- (1) Better, more effective decisions, because input from many influence the decision.
- (2) Consensus helps build trust among the group members. In majority-rule voting, competing for "Yes" votes tends to stimulate anxiety or resentment rather than trust.
- (3) More effective implementation of proposals. Making decisions is slower than with majority-rule voting but faster in taking action. In majority-rule voting, with up to 49% of the participants potentially being unhappy with a decision, the group can be slow and ambivalent about implementing it.