

WAYS of OBJECTING to a PROPOSAL WITHOUT BLOCKING

- **Non-Support** "I don't agree, but I'll go along."
- **Reservations** "I think this is a mistake because ..., but I'll live with it."
- **Standing Aside** "I personally can't do this, but I won't block others from doing it."
- **Withdrawing from the Group** "I will not be a part of this." "I'll find another group."

If the individual(s) are not willing to stand aside, and state that they block action on the proposal, **it becomes their responsibility to work for a compromise or substitute agreement.** They and one or more others should leave the large group to work out a compromise to bring back to the whole group. This prevents the large group from getting stuck on one issue, and assures that the dissenters are concerned enough about the issue to work out a compromise. Alternatively, the issue could be postponed until later in the meeting, or until the next meeting, or the time allotted for this item could be extended if resolution is near.

EMERGENCY DECISIONS-2 kinds:

These are later brought to full consensus meeting for agreement or reversal. Failure to place the item on the group's agenda indicates acceptance by default.

ED1. A decision must be made and no consensual agreement can be found. A member may then request an Emergency Decision. If 80% agree, then a vote on the Emergency Decision issue is taken requiring a super-majority of 80% agreement.

ED2. A member or committee makes a decision affecting the group that cannot wait for a full meeting. A serious error in judgement results in consequences determined by the group.

Adapted from: *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists*, 1985, Coover, Deacon, Esser, Moore, New Society Publishers (4527 Springfield Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19143 800/333-9093, \$11).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Define the problem in terms of individual's needs or preferences, not their solutions.
2. State the issue with both sides' positions.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions, no discussion, until both sides identify multiple potentially acceptable solutions or elements of a solution.
4. Evaluate alternative solutions, or construct a solution from suggested elements. Each person eliminates unacceptable solutions or elements. Never tell another person what their needs are, but use "I Statements" and Active Listening (for feelings and specific points, reflecting them back in your words to confirm that you heard correctly).
5. Decide on the best solution, acceptable to everyone, and make a mutual agreement to try it.
6. Implement the decision. Decide who will do what. Set a time to evaluate the implementation.
7. Evaluate. If necessary, restart resolution process.



HAND SIGNALS for CONSENSUS

1. Point of Process or Information · Recognized immediately by facilitator and is next in stacking order. · Process question, suggestion of alternate process, or process objection. · Point of Information - request for information, clarification, or offer of information. · Personal Need - response to insult or defamation, request to open window, etc...



2. Call on me! For voicing an opinion, comment or suggestion (not information or process). Recognized in a stacking order.



3. Focus! Indicates process failure, or lack of and need for focus, e.g., two people talking at once, distraction, talking off subject (called: "cross-town bus"), rambling or repeating what has already been said.



4. Silent Applause! Indicates agreement with what has been said, without being recognized by the facilitator.



5. Consent "YES." Agreement. "Life to the proposal."



6. Stand Aside Will allow group to proceed with proposal but will not participate.



7. Block Definite "NO" indicating a moral stand in keeping with the group's values, not a personal stand.

Consensus Process

A Process Team or Service builds an organization by teaching group facilitation, conflict resolution and consensus decision-making process.

TESTING FOR AGREEMENT

As soon as a decision seems to be emerging, or when consensus is sought, first restate the item:

- **"We are seeking consensus on ..."**

Then ask for disagreements:

- **"Is there anyone who does not agree that ..."**

Voiced concerns require additional work, otherwise state the tentative consensus as a question:

- **"Do we all agree that ..."**
- **Insist upon a response (see hand signals). Silence is not consent.** (Except among Quakers, who developed consensus process.)
- **If necessary, ask each person individually for support or reservation.** (Participants need to affirm the contract they are making with one another.)
- **Specific wording of the agreement must be written in the minutes.** (For contentious issues, suggest a trial and review period or other limits as appropriate. If there is no agreement, ask for amendments and test for agreement on these individually, then when all are agreed upon, state the amended proposal and test for consensus on the whole.)

TEAM or SELF FACILITATION

The Process Service may have any number of members, referred to as the Process Team. (In self facilitation everyone is responsible for all roles.) It is best if the Process Team meets before each meeting to decide facilitation roles (and set the agenda if not done), and again after each meeting to talk about how the facilitation was managed.

Always include a short evaluation at the end of the meeting to get Team or group feedback. The Process Team divides (and may rotate during the meeting) among themselves the following roles:

- **Greeters:** Introduces new people to the organization's mission and group process. May become a separate education and outreach committee for recruitment into the organization.
- **Process Observer/Time Keeper/FlipChart Scribe:** Pays attention to compliance with the agreed upon process, and records errors and successes for discussion during evaluation. "Vibes watching" notes unexpressed feelings, tensions, and the need to call breaks. Watches time. Scribe task may include of decisions and accepted tasks.
- **Notetaker:** Records at least the meeting attendance, proposals, amendments, decisions, and task lists. May record details of discussions.
- **Facilitator:** Finalizes and solicits agreement on the agenda. Manages participation by "stacking" names (5 max) for order of speaking, calls for "go arounds" and otherwise assures that everyone is heard. Identifies and affirms the group's values mission, and goals ("common ground"). Helps the group resolve conflicts and find compromises by summarizing, repeating, or re-phrasing proposals and positions as necessary. If the frustration level with an item is high, suggests that a small group work on the issue away from the large group, bringing their revised proposal back to the group at a later time. Leads the group in refusing to permit verbal or other attacks or domination of the meeting. Remains neutral on all topics. Steps down to participate in issues.

CONSENSUS PROCESS

- The goal of the consensus process is to reach a decision with which everyone can agree, without resort to the win-lose decision-making process of voting.
- As a group process, consensus requires that each person places their highest priority upon the good of the group as a whole, with personal needs and wants being secondary.
- Proposals and decisions should be evaluated in terms of whether they are consistent with the stated goals and values of the group.
- Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity. A group can proceed with an action without having total agreement.

STANDING ASIDE and BLOCKING

In the event that an individual or small group cannot agree with a given proposal and is blocking consensus, the facilitator may ask if the individual(s) are willing to "stand aside" and allow the group to act, or if they feel so strongly about the issue that they are unwilling for the group to act. If the individual(s) agree to stand aside, their disagreements can be noted in the minutes of the meeting, and the group is free to act on the decision. Blocking or "standing in the way of" a decision is used only when an individual feels that what is happening is going to have disastrous effects for the group (not for personal disagreement) and it becomes their responsibility to work for a compromise or substitute agreement.

SMALL to LARGE GROUP CONSENSUS

Complicated issues, or issues proposed to a very large group, can begin with a brainstorm list of solutions made by the whole group. This group then breaks into small groups, each to develop its own proposal. These proposals are presented to the large group, which discusses them and works toward consensus. Contested points are sent back to small groups until all issues are resolved.

MEETING FLOW

Items for the agenda should be listed in the minutes of the last meeting. If the agenda is not already prepared, the Process Team creates a Draft Agenda including a presenter at the meeting and a length of time for each item, while new people are greeted and oriented to the process. The agenda is presented and accepted by consensus after intros.

INTRODUCTIONS

The facilitator calls the meeting with each person stating their name and a "check-in" to present one's thoughts or feelings affecting meeting conduct. Other relevant comments may be used.

TIME KEEPING

Before an item goes over its allotted time, the group must contract for an additional block of time to be used for that discussion, taking time away from other items or extending the meeting. Alternatively, the group may accept temporary closure, or tabling of the issue, postponing it until after all of the other issues are completed (cooler) or until another meeting (freezer). This process may seem awkward, yet it helps keep comments short and to the point, and affirms the group's time contract.

ANNOUNCEMENTS and BREAKS

A break is essential after 90 minutes. Scheduling announcements just before the break accommodates late arrivers and early leavers, and provides for discussion of announcements during the break.

PROPOSALS

An item for consensus is to be in writing, assuring that detailed thought has been given. If the issue falls under a standing committee, that committee should see it before the group.

SAMPLE AGENDA

Introductions, Check-In, Getting Present, Tune-Up
Agenda Review and Consensus: 2-5 minutes
Announcements: 5-10 min. Committee Reports
Old business from earlier meetings then new, or arrange items as appropriate for the group.
Task List: Confirmation of tasks accepted.
Next Meeting: Agenda, Date, Time, Place
Evaluation: "Good and to be Improved"