

CONSENSUS DECISION PROCESS WITH BRAINSTORMING & CONSENSUS TOOLS

PURPOSES & BENEFITS

This process and set of tools help a collaborative group make collective decisions by brainstorming and setting priorities in a variety of ways using a process that builds in group consensus.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The collaborative group can use the consensus decision process when making collective decisions, including developing and implementing a strategic plan (*see Steps 3 and 4 in the toolkit*). It is an important component for how a collaborative group works together successfully.



CONSENSUS DECISION PROCESS

The consensus decision process is a useful method for a collaborative group to make decisions. The process includes the following key steps:

1. **Set the Goal** – The collaborative group needs a clear end-in-mind. The first consensus decision is to determine the end goal. Without an agreed upon goal, collective consensus will be impossible. This can be accomplished through the collaborative group’s vision and mission statements developed in Step 1B: Setting Your Collaborative Group Up for Success: Tools for Determining Your Purpose(s).
2. **Create a Vision** – Ask a question that inspires vision. Here are some examples:
What is our ideal or preferred future?
What are the indicators of a good outcome?
What would it look like if we got it right?
This can be accomplished by conducting a visioning activity with planning participants. Some example visioning activities can be found in Step 4 – Put Together an Informed Plan of the toolkit.
Additional ideas for constructing a good question can be found in the “Appreciative Inquiry” tool, which is located in the “Universal Community Organizing Concepts” section of the toolkit. When creating a vision, it helps to understand what is essential for the outcome to include and what is desired but not required.
3. **Gather Information** – What information does the team need in order to make the best decision? Who has or where is this information, and how do we obtain it? This is addressed by the community readiness and needs and resources assessment tools in Step 2 of the toolkit – Get in the Know By Taking Stock.
4. **Brainstorm Possible Options and Ideas** – Develop as many options as possible before narrowing the list of ideas. The example brainstorming tools listed on the following pages can be useful in completing this step in the consensus decision process. In addition, the facilitative leader ensures everyone understands the meaning of each idea before moving forward.
5. **Set Priorities for Possible Options and Ideas Using Relevant Criteria** – Once the group has brainstormed all of the possibilities, it’s time to prioritize the ideas. Using relevant criteria will help the group to prioritize ideas more objectively. The example consensus building tools listed on the following pages can be useful in completing this step in the consensus decision process.
6. **Make the decision as a team.** The facilitative leader checks to make sure there is full consensus before assuming everyone supports the decision. One way to do this is to use a bus analogy: The bus is leaving the station. Can you get on board? If not, what will it take to get you on our bus?

The ABCs of consensus...

- Address the issue (Steps 1 – 3)
- Brainstorm all the possibilities (Step 4)
- Come to consensus (Step 5 and 6)

Adapted from Tagliere, D. (1992). *How to meet, think, and work to consensus*. Pfeiffer, Amsterdam.



BRAINSTORMING TOOLS

Below are some example tools that can help a collaborative group with brainstorming, step 4 of the consensus decision process outlined on the “Consensus Decision Process.”

Open Brainstorming

1. After presenting the issue for discussion, which is helpful when framed in the form of a question such as “If we got it right ...”, keep it in front of the group (e.g., flipchart, power point slide, etc.). For further ideas on constructing good framing questions for expanding thinking/brainstorming, see the “Appreciative Inquiry” tool located in the “Universal Community Organizing Concepts” section of the toolkit.
2. The purpose of brainstorming is to generate all of the possible ideas for the issue being discussed; therefore, establishing ground rules for brainstorming can be helpful to maintain the intended spirit of brainstorming and not allow the group to jump too far ahead in the consensus-decision process before they’re ready. Here are some example ground rules for brainstorming:
 - Do not judge, limit or reject ideas
 - Repeating ideas is fine
 - Building further upon ideas is fine
 - Be patient during silences and wait for them to end – the greatest creativity may follow
 - The more ideas the better
3. Quickly record ideas so everyone can read them as they are shared. Do not filter the ideas; just record them as they are presented. Continue listing ideas until all ideas are exhausted. Briefly discuss, clarify, and consolidate the listed ideas.

Value-Added or Round Robin Brainstorming

Value added or round robin brainstorming is a tool for identifying all of the important, collective, unduplicated ideas from group members.

1. Like the first step in open brainstorming above, define the issue in the form of a question and put in front of the group on a flipchart, power point slide, etc. For further ideas on constructing good framing questions for expanding thinking/brainstorming, see the “Appreciative Inquiry” tool located in the “Universal Community Organizing Concepts” section of the toolkit.
2. Ask group members to work individually and write down their three ideas on the issue before the group. After a few minutes, ask group members to independently prioritize their ideas.
3. Start a Value Added/Round Robin call out. The first person calls out his/her top priority idea. The second calls out his/her top idea unless it is the same as the first idea that was shared. In that case, the second participant calls out his/her second priority idea. This continues until all ideas are exhausted and recorded. As an option, you can ask the group to indicate if they had also listed an idea recorded in order to keep a total count in order to illustrate the priority of a particular idea among group members.
4. Discuss and consolidate ideas.

Affinity/Theming Brainstorming

1. Like the first step in open and value-added brainstorming above, define the issue in the form of a question and put in front of the group on a flipchart, power point slide, etc. For further ideas on constructing good framing questions for expanding thinking/brainstorming, see the “Appreciative Inquiry” tool located in the “Universal Community Organizing Concepts” section of the toolkit.
2. Ask group members to write down all their ideas on post-it notes (the 3x5 post-it notes are the perfect size), listing only one idea per post-it note.

3. Conduct a call and sort activity as follows:
 - Start this activity by asking for a volunteer to read one of his /her notes and place it on a blank flipchart.
 - Ask if anyone has written down a similar idea and read each note as it is placed on the same flipchart.
 - Once a few similar ideas are placed on the same flipchart, ask the group to name the natural relationship between the ideas and record it on the flipchart as a heading. These identified natural relationships can be referred to as themes.
 - Once all of the similar ideas have been called out, ask for a new idea and post it on a new flipchart. Replicate the process outlined in the bullets above to identify a theme.
 - Continue to call and sort ideas until all post-it notes are posted on flipcharts and themed. Allow the group to direct the movement of post-it notes to different flipcharts as the group refines the natural relationships between their ideas.

Adapted from Ray, R. (2006). *The facilitative leader: Behaviors that enable success*. Little Hocking, OH: RayCom Learning.

CONSENSUS BUILDING TOOLS

The example consensus building tools below can help a collaborative group objectively prioritize and reach consensus (i.e., steps 5 and 6 of the consensus decision process) on those ideas which will help the group most effectively achieve the goal or end-in-mind they identified during step 1 of the consensus decision process.

List Reduction

The most effective list reduction technique is to combine similar ideas into a single idea.

1. Collaborative group members each look for commonalities and themes and present them to the full group for feedback, working to identify opportunities to combine ideas into a single idea.
2. When a group is faced with more ideas than can be reasonably managed, the list can be further reduced. Before going any further, it may be helpful at this point for the group to review their vision and mission statements and/or goal/end-in-mind identified in step 1 of the consensus decision process. Next, ask the group to discuss each idea and determine if the item is a "Must Have" or a "Would Like." Each item is then marked with a "MH" or a "WL." "Must Have" ideas are addressed first as the groups continues planning.

Voting

If you anticipate the group will need to prioritize ideas, leave room on flipcharts for voting boxes (see the example below).

THEME:	VOTE HERE
Idea #1 ...	
Idea #2 ...	
Idea #3 ...	
Idea #4 ...	

1. Voting should take place after list reduction.
2. Give each member of the group a specific number of voting dots (depending on the number of ideas listed under a theme).
3. Group members then vote for their top idea(s) based upon the number of dots given to each member. Group members should not vote for an idea more than once in order to avoid vote loading for a particular idea.
4. Allow time for each person to vote and then call out the results for each theme.
5. Proceed with the ideas that received the most votes.

Multi-Voting

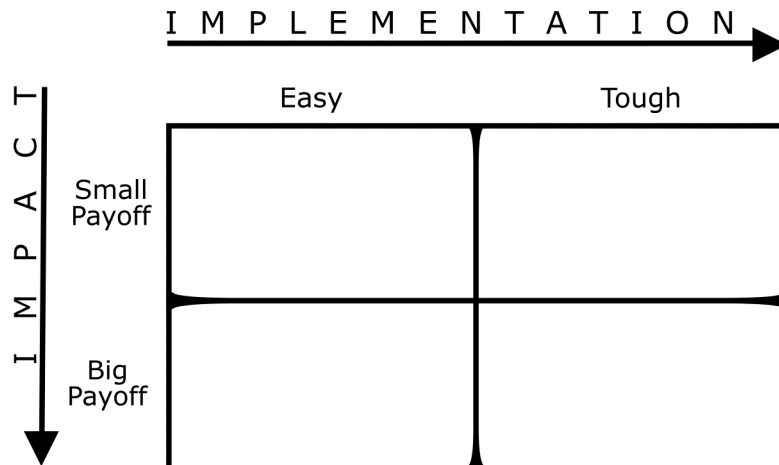
Multi-voting builds consensus by eliminating individual ownership of specific items. For an individual item to progress to the next round of voting, it must receive a number of votes greater or equal to half the number of group members. For example, if there are 20 participants, a strategy must receive at least 10 votes to move on to Round 2.

1. In Round 1, each group member may vote on all of the ideas he/she considers important. Group members may vote for as many single items as they wish, but should only vote for items they believe are important. Participants should not vote for an idea more than once.
2. Items receiving enough votes are presented back to the group.

3. In Round 2, each group member is allowed a total of three votes. (If there are 20 participants, a strategy must receive at least 5 votes to move on.) Once again, participants should not vote for a strategy more than once.
4. Items receiving enough votes are then presented back to the group.
5. If needed, a third round can be conducted. In this round, each group member is allowed one vote for the remaining items. When a round results in three items or less, the process is completed.

Payoff Matrix

The payoff matrix is a consensus tool that works well after a multi-voting or when a limited number of ideas are being considered. The template for the payoff matrix is as follows:



1. Each idea is tested against

two questions arranged in a simple matrix:

- Will implementation be easy or tough? (horizontal axis)
- Will the impact be small or big? (vertical axis)

2. The group then discusses in which quadrant each idea should be placed. The priority of action is informed by the quadrant chosen. For example, an easy implementation with a big payoff takes a high priority. A tough implementation that is likely to yield a small payoff is a low priority.

Nominal Group Process

This process is basically a round robin method for generating ideas.

1. Once all ideas are posted on flipcharts, group members rank the ideas silently and independently, choosing the five ideas with the most promise.
2. Group members report and discuss their rankings.
3. Another silent and independent re-ranking of ideas takes place.
4. Group members report and discuss their final rankings, and the group seeks consensus on listing the ideas in rank order.

Best Practice Resources Allocation

After brainstorming a list of all possible ideas, this consensus building approach helps the collaborative group consider how to prioritize by assigning percentages to the ideas, which are considered resources.

1. Consider the ideas generated, listing them out in the space provided below.
2. You have a total 100% of resources to allocate. Decide individually and then collectively, or work together to decide how to allocate your resources towards the ideas listed. You can decide to not allocate any resources towards any particular idea if you believe it takes away from resources that could be better spent elsewhere on other ideas.

Idea:	% of Resources Allocated
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____
Total	= 100%

3. Debrief as needed while finalizing resource allocation setting or after initial resource allocation setting with questions such as:
 - *Based on this exercise, what should we be doing more of/less of?*
 - *What were the hardest decisions you had to make?*
 - *How do your results fit with the collaborative group's vision and mission and/or goal/end-in-mind identified in step 1 of the consensus decision process?*

Some of the consensus building tools presented here are adapted from Ray, R. (2006). *The facilitative leader: Behaviors that enable success*. Little Hocking, OH: RayCom Learning.