

# Consensus Decision Making

## Use Consensus Decision-Making when:

- thorough discussion and exploration of the issues and/or the data are important to a quality outcome;
- a good decision requires multiple sources of expertise;
- the facts are few, and both judgment and opinion are required;
- implementation of the decision requires the support of many if not all members.

## **Consensus means everyone in the group has the opportunity to influence the decision.**

Contrary to popular belief, consensus does not mean everyone agrees, but rather that everyone can see the wisdom in the majority's choice. While the final decision may not be everyone's first choice, the intent of the consensus building process is that participation is inclusive and robust enough for all to ultimately support the final outcome.

## Behaviors that support the consensus process:

- state your preferences, beliefs, or positions on the issue at hand;
- speak in favor of your position including your rationale and reasons;
- avoid attacking other positions as a way of enhancing your own;
- look for points of agreement among members as a way to establish common ground;
- listen carefully to all information that is presented;
- ask questions for clarification;
- seek to understand others perceptions;
- view differences of opinion as a help rather than a hindrance;
- stay open to being influenced.

## Silence is not consent.

If you have no opinion or position, say so. This lets other members know you are open to being influenced. In consensus decision-making, it is essential that each member of the group "put his/her stake in the ground," and be willing and able to move it. To help manage the time required for consensus decision making, let others know when you change your mind, are wavering, or when you see the wisdom in a particular point made by another member.

Resolving the inevitable differences that arise in decision-making is essential to reaching real consensus. Do not change your mind to avoid conflict, acquiesce to the leader, or complete the task quickly. These behaviors may lead to resentment later and erode support for implementation. At the same time, an effective group member knows when it is appropriate, and is able, to give up his/her individual positions or wants in the interest of what is best for the group, the team, or the organization.

## A consensus decision is one that everyone can support. Support means you can:

- defend the decision to others;
- influence others toward the decision;
- speak in favor of the decision; and
- work for the decision.