

## Methods of Decision-Making

There are five primary methods of decision-making, four of which involve group input. Effective leaders and effective groups utilize each of these methods at different times. For leaders, the challenge is to determine which of these methods is most appropriate for the desired outcome. When selecting a decision-making method, consider the importance and value of group members' commitment to the decision and to its implementation as a significant criterion. To optimize group engagement and support, make the decision-making process explicit before discussion begins.

### Decision-Making Alternatives:

- **Unilateral: the leader or a designee makes the decision.** Use this method when time is a critical factor, when support of the group or team is not essential, or when the decision is clearly linked to, or dictated by, policy, established practice, or compliance.
- **Consultative: the leader or a designee makes the decision with input from others.** Use this method when the decision maker is actually open to influence and wants a sense of the group. If not, don't ask.
- **Minority Rule: a designated few are empowered to make the decision.** Group members should be clear about the parameters of their influence as well as who has responsibility for making the decision. Use this method when decision makers need additional data, input, or perspectives from a variety of sources for a quality decision, when there is not enough time to involve group members in a consensus process, or when there is reason to have particular expertise or authority over the decision-making process.
- **Majority Rule: the group decides by a vote.** This is the win-lose approach. Use this method when abiding by the decision of the majority will not fundamentally disrupt the group, when disagreement over the outcome will not substantively hinder the group's next steps, or when governed by parliamentary procedure.
- **Consensus: all members of the group or team have opportunity to influence the final decision.** Use this approach when implementation of the decision will require the support of many, when you need the input of multiple perspectives and resources, or when facts are few and both judgment and opinion are required for a quality decision. (See Consensus Decision-Making Handout)

### Follow These Step for Effective Decision-Making

- Clearly define the issue or problem.
- Create a clear charge or charter for the group.
- Make the group's level of authority clear to all members. Secure a commitment from the organization to carry out the group's decisions.
- Provide an agenda and describe the procedure or structure for the discussion.
- Select and define the decision-making process.
- Ensure that the people who will add value to the discussion are in the room.
- Determine what data and information are necessary for quality discussion and good outcomes and ensure that data/information is available.
- Close the meeting with a review of agreements made and clarity about next steps.