

The Fundamentals of Consensus

Consensus is:

- Informal, face-to-face interaction among representatives of stakeholding groups
- Finding a solution acceptable enough that most members can support it
- The judgment arrived at by most of those concerned
- Group solidarity in sentiment and belief
- General agreement of members present
- A mutual feeling that all concerns of the group have been addressed

Consensus is not:

- A unanimous vote
- A majority vote
- When everyone is totally satisfied

Consensus Requires:

- Time
- Active participation of all group members
- Skills in communication:
 - listening
 - conflict resolution
 - discussion
 - facilitation
- Creative thinking and open-mindedness

The consensus building process requires understanding that:

- The one person in disagreement is often representative of a much larger group in disagreement.
- Opposition to a decision made by the consensus group requires an articulated reason or an alternative solution. A person or group cannot oppose a decision because they “just don’t like” it.
- Different points of view must be considered.
- Points must be deliberated based on merit and validity, and not on the person presenting them.
- If the person disagreeing can support the group’s decision, consensus has been reached. If they cannot support the group’s decision, further discussion is required.
- While it may sometimes appear to be a long process, collective decision-making provides for quicker and smoother implementation of the group’s decisions.