

Building Consensus Workshop

By Jordan Burg - CSDF-FCDE 2021 National Seminar
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I. Consensus: What Is It and Why Use It?

- A. **Definition:** *At the heart of consensus is the respectful dialogue between equals. It's about working together to meet the needs of both the individual and the group; a win-win situation! Consensus decision making means that people have full control over their lives, and that power is shared by all, and not just in the hand of a few. The group adapts to the needs of all members in the creation of a common future.*
- B. Indigenous Communities/Territorial Governments
- C. Role of good debating and public speaking skills

II. The Conditions for Consensus

- A. **Common Goal:**

Everyone in the group embraces a common goal and works toward it. Consider how you will get there. What are the challenges?
- B. **Commitment:**

Real commitment requires a deep desire for success, preparedness for listening, keeping an open mind, absolute honesty, and a willingness to shift and reassess.
- C. **Trust:**

We must trust that everyone in the group shares the commitment to success in reaching consensus. Respect and equal rights are paramount. Manipulation of others constitutes a breach in this trust, and dooms the process.
- D. **Openness:**

Consider your desires. What would you *like* to see happen? What do you *want* to happen? What do you *need* to happen? Being open adds valuable information for all participants to fully understand each other.
- E. **Time:**

Building and achieving consensus takes time, but time needs to be used wisely within the constraints of the meeting. Do not be wasteful of time, and make good choices to maximize efficiency; stay on track!
- F. **Process:**

Once a process is established, do not veer from it. Everyone in the group must have a clear understanding of how the process works and operate within it.
- G. **Participation:**

Everyone needs to participate by being active in listening and speaking. All sides must be heard from, and reluctance to speak one's thoughts and feelings could create problems after consensus has been reached. Discuss it now, not later.
- H. **Acceptance:**

Once consensus has been achieved, the decision is final, and it must be accepted by all participants in good faith. Gripping or complaining after the fact means that the process has failed.

III. The Decision Making Process:

A. Introduction:

Clarify the task at hand. What is the objective? What are the key issues?

B. Exploration of Issues and Ideas:

Consider your own opinions and thoughts. Gather the opinions and thoughts of others. Consider the pros and cons. This is the basis of the ensuing discussions.

C. Emerging Proposals:

Begin to ponder possible solutions and outcomes as they emerge. Synthesis: weave together the best elements and ideas, and be open to change.

D. Discuss, Clarify, and Amend:

As proposals develop, consider the needs of all participants, and be sure everyone has had the opportunity to contribute. What amendments and changes can make the proposal even more accessible to the entire group?

E. Test for Agreement:

Do you have agreement? Check for:

Blocks – have fundamental disagreements been resolved?

Stands – are people standing aside for the sake of agreement?

Reservations – is there doubt?

Agreement – is there support and willingness to implement?

Consensus – no blocks, stands, or reservations, only agreement?

SUCCESS!!

F. Implementation:

Who? When? How? What needs to be done to get the decision working?

IV. Guidelines for Reaching Consensus:

- If you are unsure, unclear, or confused, don't be afraid to say so
- Be willing to work towards a solution; stay flexible
- Be pro-active in creating an atmosphere of respect and trust
- Explain your own ideas thoughtfully, clearly, and honestly
- Listen carefully and with consideration to what others have to say
- Golden Rule: *Think before you speak and listen before you object!*
- Don't fear disagreement; embrace it.

V. Key Skills for Consensus:

A. Active Listening:

A deliberate effort to listen is the key to greater understanding

B. Summarizing:

A succinct and accurate summary of people's input not only helps to move towards a decision, it helps to identify the emergence of solutions and to identify unresolved issues.

C. Synthesis:

Look for common ground and connections amongst competing ideas. Focus on fundamental solutions and key concerns to search for a path to a decision.