

# Consensus Decision Making

## What is consensus ?

Consensus is a creative and dynamic decision making process that works to include all those making the decision. Instead of simply voting for an item, and having the majority of the group getting their way, a consensus group is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports, or at least can live with. This ensures that all opinions, ideas and concerns are taken into account. But consensus is neither a compromise nor unanimity. In consensus there's room to agree to disagree. It is a process that can result in surprising and creative solutions. At its best it's inspiring and affirming. Consensus is about participation and equalising power. It can also be a very powerful process for building communities and empowering individuals.

Consensus can work in all types of settings: small groups of activists, local communities, businesses, even whole nations and territories. For example, the Zapatista movement in lower Mexico (Oaxaca and Chiapas) answers to a public control called "la consulta". This group - comprised of all men, women and children age 12 and over - meets in local meetings where discussion is held and all the members make the final decision.

Within small groups consensus tends to be more simple, as everyone can get to know each other and reach a mutual understanding of backgrounds, values and viewpoints. For larger groups different processes have been developed, such as splitting into smaller units for discussion and decision-making with constant exchange and feedback between the different units. This briefing has examples and ideas for reaching consensus in groups of just a handful up to hundreds and even thousands of people.

## What's wrong with majority voting ?

Many of us have been brought up in a culture which believes that the western-style system of one-person-one-vote and elected leaders is the supreme form of democracy. Yet in the very nations which shout loudest about the virtues of democracy, many people don't even bother voting anymore, because they feel that it doesn't make any difference to their lives. It's true that majority voting enables even controversial decisions to be taken in a minimum amount of time, but there is nothing to say that this decision will be a wise one or morally acceptable. After all, at one time, the majority of colonial Americans supported the 'right' to hold slaves.

When people vote for an executive they hand over their power to make decisions and to effect change. This goes hand in hand with creating a majority and a minority - a situation in which there are winners and losers. This can promote a culture of aggression and conflict, and lends itself to society steam rolling an idea over a minority that dissents with the majority opinion. The will of the majority is seen as the will of the whole group, with the minority expected to accept and carry out the decision,

### Who uses consensus ?

Consensus is not a new idea, but has been tested and proven around the world. Non-hierarchical societies have existed on the American continent for hundreds of years. Before 1600, five nations - the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca - formed the **Haudenosaunee Confederation**, working on a consensual basis and which is still in existence today. There are also many examples of successful and stable utopian communes using consensus decision making, such as the **Christian Herrnhüter settlements** 1741-1760 and the production commune **Boimondeau** in France 1941-1972. **Christiania**, an autonomous district in the city of Copenhagen has been self-governed by its inhabitants using consensus since 1970. Within the co-operative movement many housing co-ops and businesses are using consensus successfully.

even if it is against their most deeply held convictions and principles. A vivid example is the imprisonment of conscientious objectors against military service in democratic countries such as Germany.

## Why use consensus ?

In contrast to majority voting consensus decision making is about finding common ground and 'win-win' solutions that are acceptable to all. Decisions are reached in a *dialogue between equals*, who take each other seriously and who recognise each other's equal rights. In consensus every person has the power to make changes in the system, and to prevent changes that they find unacceptable. The right to veto (or block) a decision means that minorities cannot just be ignored, but creative solutions will have to be found to deal with their concerns.

Another benefit of consensus is that all members agree to the final decision and therefore are much more committed to actually turning it into reality.

## How does Consensus work ?

There are many different formats and ways of building consensus. Some groups have developed detailed procedures, whereas in other groups it may be an organic process. This also depends on the size of the group and how well people know each other. Below we have outlined a process that covers all the aspects of consensus, but can easily be adapted to fit your group. There are however a few conditions that underpin good consensus building:

## Conditions for good consensus

For consensus to work well in any group, you need to make sure that certain conditions are met. These are particularly important in a large group meeting.

**Common Goal:** Everyone present at the meeting needs to have some common ground – whether it's the desire to take action at a specific event, or a shared ethos. Finding the common goal and bringing the group back to it when differences arise can keep a meeting focused and united. The deeper the common goal the stronger consensus can be.

**Commitment to consensus building:** Consensus requires trust, commitment, patience, tolerance, and a willingness to put the group first. It would be easy to call for a vote at the first sign of difficulty, but in the consensus model, disagreement is a tool for helping to build a stronger final decision.

**Sufficient time** for making decisions and for learning to work by consensus. In international groups you might also need to allow time for translation. In *spokescouncils* (see below) you need to allow time for *affinity groups* to consult and come to their own consensus. Taking time to make a good decision now can save wasting time revisiting a bad one later.

**Clear Process** It's essential for everyone to have a shared understanding of the process that the meeting is using. There are lots of variations of the consensus process, so even if people are experienced in using consensus they may use it differently to you! Use a process appropriate to the size of your group and explain it at the beginning of the meeting. You could hang up a large piece of paper with a flowchart of the consensus process to help people remember which stage of

### Glossary

**Affinity Group** – a group of people that choose to work together and support each other, usually to take direct action, because of shared beliefs, values or aims

**Facilitator**– one or more people whose role is ensure a meeting runs smoothly, efficiently and democratically

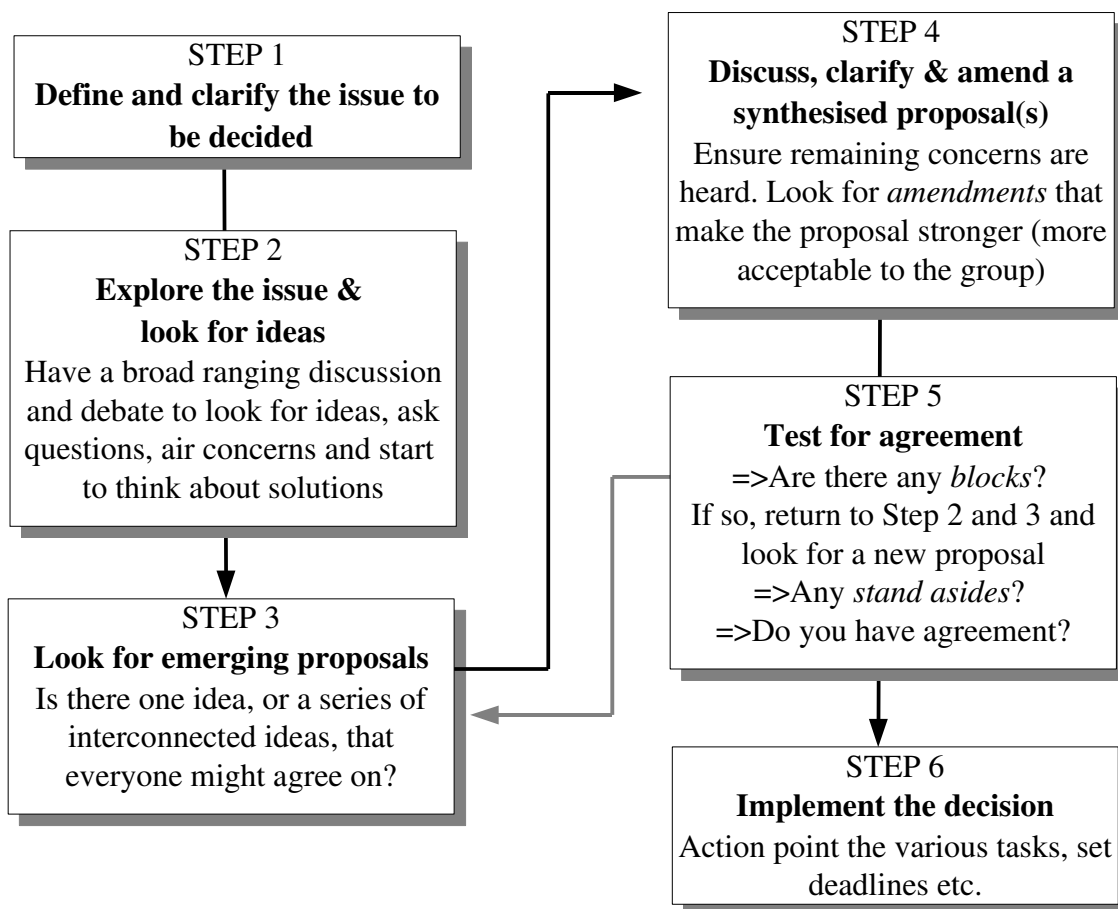
**Spokescouncil** – a meeting tool that allows hundreds or thousands of people to participate in a consensus decision (see below)

the process you are at. There may also be *group agreements* or *handsignals* (see *Tools* section) in use that need to be explained.

**Good facilitation and active participation:** Appoint one or more facilitators to help your group meeting run more smoothly. The facilitators are there to ensure that the group works harmoniously, creatively and democratically. They're also there to make sure the task of the meeting gets done - that decisions are made and implemented. To make that possible they need active support from everyone present. For more info see our briefing on *Facilitation*.

## The Consensus Process

There are lots of consensus models out there. The following basic procedure outlines the different stages that are common to most models:



# What if we cannot agree?

Where the conditions for good consensus exist in a group, in all but a very few cases the above model will achieve consensus, providing there is commitment to coming to a decision. However there are times when one or more people disagree more or less strongly with the rest of the group and no solution is in sight. Listed below are some ways of dealing with this. The first two, *non-support* and *standing aside*, allow the group to proceed with the decision, whilst allowing reservations to be expressed. There are also times when consensus is the wrong decision making tool for a group - see *When not to use consensus* in the box on page 5.

**Non-support:** Non-support is a form of registering your dissent with the decision being made. It doesn't effect your overall commitment to the group. You may even put energy into implementing the idea once the rest of the group has acknowledged your dissent. Non-support might sound something like: "I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along with it."

**Standing aside:** Standing aside effectively means that whilst the decision goes ahead, you personally don't play an active part in implementing it. Sometimes that can translate as: "I'm unhappy enough with this decision not to put any effort into making it a reality, but if the rest of you want to go ahead, I won't stop you." In this case the person standing aside is not responsible for the consequences. This could be recorded in the minutes. On the other hand, standing aside can be more pragmatic. Sometimes you might like the decision but be unable to support it because of other time commitments or your personal energy levels. "I'm OK with the decision, but I'm not going to be around next week to make it happen."

**Veto (the Block):** A single veto blocks the proposal from passing. A veto is a major objection. It means that you cannot live with the proposal, if it passes, because you feel it threatens the integrity of the group. Either you, or others will struggle to stay part of the group, if the group takes this decision. Because consensus is about building community and working as a group (the sum being greater than it's parts), you veto to preserve the wholeness of the group. As such, vetoing is a positive action.

A major objection isn't an "I don't really like it" or "I liked the other idea better." It is an "This proposal is bad for this group, and here is why...!" The group can either accept the veto and immediately look for another proposal, or discuss the issue further and see if it can amend the proposal to overcome the objection.

The veto is a powerful tool and should be used with caution. Veto with the group's interests at heart, not to promote your personal agenda. Ideally strong concerns will be heard early enough in the discussion to be taken into account in the synthesised proposal under discussion and a block will be unnecessary.

**Agree to disagree** the group decides that no agreement can be reached on this issue. What can be done when we need to reach agreement and we are poles apart? Here are some suggestions:

- ★ Allow the person most concerned to make the decision.
- ★ Leave the decision for later or take a break. Have an energising activity or a cup of tea.
- ★ Ask everyone to argue convincingly the point of view they like the least.
- ★ Break down the decision into smaller areas. See which ones you can agree on and see what points of disagreement are left.
- ★ Identify the assumptions and beliefs underlying the issue. Get to the heart of the matter. Imagine what will happen in six months, a year, five year's time if you don't agree. How important is the decision now?
- ★ Put all the possibilities into a hat and pull one out, or toss a coin. Agree in advance on this.

- ★ Bring in a facilitator. If your group is unable to work through conflicts or if similar issues keep coming up, think about bringing in an external facilitator or mediator who is trained in conflict-resolution techniques.
- ★ Some groups also have majority voting as a backup, often requiring an overwhelming vote such as 80 or 90% to make a decision valid. Be careful not to resort to this at the first sign of trouble – it's a definite last resort in a consensual group.

**Leaving the group:** If one person continually finds him/herself at odds with the rest of the group, it may be time to think about the reasons for this. Is this really the right group to be in? Is the group meeting those conditions for good consensus (see above)?

\*but see our briefing on *Quick Decision Making Using Consensus*

## **When not to use consensus**

(from Starhawk's book: 'Truth or Dare')

### **When there is no group in mind**

A group thinking process cannot work effectively unless the group is cohesive enough to generate shared attitudes and perceptions. When deep divisions exist within a group's bonding over their individual desires, consensus becomes an exercise in frustration.

### **When there are no good choices**

Consensus process can help a group find the best possible solution to a problem, but it is not an effective way to make either-or-choices between evils, for members will never be able to agree which is worse. If the group has to choose between being shot and hung, flip a coin. When a group gets bogged down trying to make a decision, stop for a moment and consider: Are we blocked because we are given an intolerable situation? Are we being given the illusion, but not the reality, of choice? Might our most empowering act be to refuse to participate in this farce?

### **When they can see the whites of your eyes**

In emergencies, in situations where urgent and immediate action is necessary, appointing a temporary leader may be the wisest course of action\*.

### **When the issue is trivial**

I have known groups to devote half an hour to trying to decide by consensus whether to spend forty minutes or a full hour at lunch. Remember consensus is a thinking process – where there is nothing to think about, flip a coin.

### **When the group has insufficient information**

When you're lost in the hills, and no one knows the way home, you cannot figure out how to get there by consensus. Send out scouts. Ask: Do we have the information we need to have to solve this problem? Can we get it?

## **Guidelines for consensus building**

Consciously or unconsciously, an effective consensus group will be doing the following things. Most of them are about the attitude and ethos of consensus. For some specific facilitation tools that help give structure to this attitude, see *Tools for Facilitating Consensus* below.

### **Effective Participation**

- Make sure everyone understands the topic/problem. While building consensus make sure everyone is following, listening to and understanding each other.
- Ensure that all members contribute their ideas and knowledge related to the subject.

- Explain your own position clearly. Listen to other members' reactions and consider them carefully before pressing your point.
- Be respectful and trust each other. This is not a competition. Nobody must be afraid to express their ideas and opinions. Remember that we all have different values and opinions, different behaviours, different areas and thresholds of distress.
- The ideal behind consensus is empowering versus overpowering, agreement versus majorities/minorities. The process of consensus is what you put into it as an individual and a part of the group. Be open and honest about the reasons for your view points.
- Remember that we're talking about consensus decision making - a process in which the group is committed to working towards the idea that's best for the whole group. Reminding yourself and the group at the start of a discussion that this is the case can prevent some of the faction fighting that can arise when consensus isn't working well.

## **Conflict in Consensus**

- Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches stalemate. Don't view proposals as being in competition with each other – consensus is not an adversarial system. You're looking for a win-win solution and trying to bring together the best elements of all the opinions and ideas that are expressed to find an acceptable solution for all parties.
- Distinguish between vetos and discomfiture/amendments. A veto is a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal.
- Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and achieve harmony. When agreement seems to come quickly and easily, be suspicious, explore the reasons and be sure that everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Many of us are scared of open disagreement and avoid it where we can. Easily reached consensus may cover up low esteem or lack of safety for some people to express their disagreements openly.
- Differences of opinion are natural and to be expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the group's decision, because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance the group will hit on more adequate solutions. However you must also be flexible and willing to give something up to reach an agreement in the end.

## **Reflection and Synthesis**

- Think before you speak, listen before you object. Self restraint is essential in consensus – sometimes the biggest obstacle to progress is individual attachment to one idea. If another proposal is good, don't complicate matters by opposing it just because it isn't your favourite idea! Ask yourself these questions: “Does this idea work for the group, even if I don't like it the best?” or “Are all our ideas good? And if that's the case, does it matter which one we choose?”
- Allow enough time for the process of building consensus. Being quick is not a sign of quality. Thinking issues through properly needs time. For taking major decisions or in a controversial situation, it is always a good idea to postpone the decisions, “to sleep on it” and to allow plenty of discussion before looking for definite proposals.
- Encourage some time for general discussion and reflection before any firm proposals are formed. Throw around ideas, not proposals, and encourage everyone to express their reservations about any of the ideas nice and early to avoid vetoing and counter proposals later. Then try to draw out a proposal that reflects the common ground that has emerged in the discussion. In an ideal meeting many ideas might be discussed but only one proposal would emerge from them. That proposal would then be amended to the satisfaction of the whole group before a final decision was reached. Consensus is visionary stuff and sometimes requires leaps of the imagination. Create a proposal that takes the best from all the ideas, or for a way of using several of the proposals side by side.

# Common problems and how to overcome them

## Consensus can be time consuming

It takes longer to look at ideas until all objections are resolved. Your group meetings may be longer and some decisions might regularly take more than one meeting to decide. However, the advantage of consensus decision making is that decisions are usually of a higher standard. Bad decisions may not take as long to make in the first place, but they often need revisiting, or have little real commitment behind them and so don't get implemented at all, or fully. Also a bad decision can cause resentment which bubbles up in later meetings leading to conflict, which takes time to resolve!

### Tips for saving time in consensus

Here's a few tips if you want to make good decisions, but do so as time-efficiently as possible:

- ◆ **Make sure that all the information you need to make an informed decision is at the meeting. If not, don't waste time discussing the issue. Decide what needs to be done to get the information to the next meeting and then move on**
- ◆ **Not every decision needs to involve the whole group. Set up working groups on different areas, such as publicity, fundraising, research. These sub-group can then decide**

**the nitty-gritty business that they are responsible for, within the limits that the group has defined beforehand. This leaves less on the agenda of full group meetings**

- ◆ **Get a small group, or even a pair, to go away and synthesise the discussions and ideas of the whole group into a few possible solutions to be brought back and discussed later by the whole group**
- ◆ **Split up the meeting to deal with several issues in parallel and come back with a platter of proposals. This can speed up the meeting threefold or more**

## Time pressure

Time pressure to find a solution to an urgent problem leads to stress and group pressure "to just get on with it".

- ★ Be realistic about your meeting agendas. Try to make sure enough time is allowed in the agenda to tackle all issues adequately. Prioritise which decisions need to be taken there and then and which ones can wait a while.
- ★ You could also try to find a temporary solution.

## Misuse of the right to veto

Actively participating in groups can be hard enough, and using a veto more so, particularly for people who don't feel confident in groups. It can involve standing up to perceived or actual group pressure and impatience. Many people are tempted to keep quiet (at least in a vote they can raise their hand) and important discussions are sometimes avoided.

In the hands of those used to more than their fair share of power and attention, the veto can be a lethal tool. It can magnify their voices, and be used to guard against changes that might affect their power base and influence. In a well functioning group vetos should be rarely if ever seen - not only because they are a last resort, but also because ideally a member's unhappiness should be picked up on before before it gets to a veto stage.

Don't be afraid of the veto. A veto is often seen as a negative act. But if you're vetoing to prevent a decision that will splinter your group, you're doing everyone a favour. However, if you feel a veto is being misused:

- ➔ Remind people of the purpose of the veto regularly so they know that they should block a proposal for the benefit of the whole group.
- ➔ Work on creating a safe atmosphere. Challenge put-downs, discriminatory and aggressive behaviour. Make use of facilitation as a tool for involving all members of the group equally.
- ➔ Try to uncover the group dynamics at work. The way people behave in groups generally reflect some hidden needs or past experiences. If someone regularly vetos it may indicate the group isn't meeting their needs – perhaps they don't feel listened to in the group's discussions?
- ➔ Ask the blocker to explain why they are using their veto. Perhaps by understanding the reasons, the group will realise that they can amend the proposal and find consensus. Maybe it'll become obvious that the objection is really a stand aside and not a veto.
- ➔ Don't be afraid of making modifications to your consensus procedure. Some groups allow the possibility of falling back on an overwhelming majority vote or on drawing lots, if an issue cannot be resolved by consensus. Others allow for vetoing a veto if everyone but the person blocking agrees.

## **Dealing with multiple proposals and counter proposals**

Ideally avoid having meetings in which several ideas are being discussed at once in the whole group, especially in larger groups. It's almost impossible to keep this sort of discussion focused and give each idea a fair hearing. Pick a process that gives space to hear each idea and that allows it to be treated on its merits. Realistically, it's not usually as simple as listening to 4 individual ideas and then managing to synthesise them into 1 combined super-proposal, but that should be your aim. A good basic process for consensus meetings is to:

- ★ Remind people that consensus isn't an adversarial system – proposals aren't in competition with each other
- ★ Get ideas out early
- ★ Have some general discussion to explore the obvious potential and obvious problems of the ideas
- ★ Only then try to draw out the best proposal for the group
- ★ Focus on that proposal, only returning to earlier ideas if the proposal is rejected

This is an ideal. But if despite knowing this your group meetings regularly suffers from multiple proposals or counter proposals leading to confusion and conflict, think about the following process:

### **Generating ideas and moving towards an agreed proposal**

One of the easiest ways to get ideas out and start moving towards a proposal is to:

1. Have an *ideastorm* (see *Tools* section) and capture the ideas on paper so they're not lost. Of course you don't want to close the door to new ideas that might emerge as the discussion continues – write those up as they happen. Ideastorms can be done as a whole group or after breaking into small groups.
2. Clarify all the ideas so that people fully understand them and are in a position to prioritise them. Allow a few moments for questions and clarification, but be careful not to get drawn into discussion of specific ideas at this stage. That comes later.
3. Once all the ideas are listed and understood prioritise them to give an initial idea of what the group is initially drawn to – see the *Tools* section below for a few simple ideas about how to narrow down your list to a manageable number. A well facilitated discussion will naturally prioritise ideas over time. Don't lose the full list of ideas – you may find that none of the top ideas works in practice and that you have to come back to your original list to choose replacements.

4. Then use one of the following tools during your discussion to differentiate between remaining ideas. See the tools section for more information and ideas:

- ◆ **working groups** – split into small groups each taking one of the prioritised ideas and testing it out in discussion. The working groups need to look for any major obstacles that might emerge, and possible solutions to those issues. Is the idea likely to be vetoed? Can it be done with the resources available to the group? On the plus side, is there real energy for it in the working group? Can problems be overcome? Working groups then bring their ideas back to the full group with a recommendation – it could be to drop the idea, to move forward with it as a strong favourite, or anything in between. Obviously this method allows for several ideas to be discussed in parallel, saving time, but requires that the individuals in the group trust each other enough not to need to be present in every discussion.
- ◆ **dealing with proposals one at a time** and accepting it will take a lot longer. Choose your top few ideas and then discuss each one, bringing it to the point of decision making. You might find that one arouses a lot of controversy, another a lot of apathy, a third has some energy behind it, but the last one gets everyone excited.
- ◆ **small group to large group consensus** is perhaps the most inclusive, effective and overtly co-operative method for working with several ideas in larger groups.

## Consensus in Large Groups

Trying to find consensus in a large group brings its own challenges and rewards. The conditions for good consensus still apply, but might seem harder to fulfil in a bigger, more diverse group. The stages of the consensus process also still apply, although each step may take longer and require more specialist facilitation tools. Consensus requires active participation from everyone – much harder to achieve in a large group of people. But when it's working, consensus in large groups can be exhilarating and inspirational!

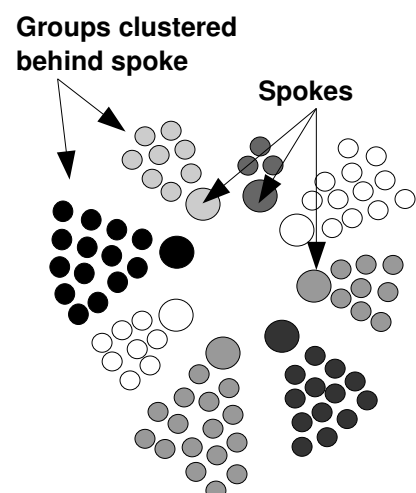
Perhaps the most common process for making consensus decisions in a large group is the spokescouncil:

### The Spokescouncil

In a spokescouncil, smaller groups come together to make shared decisions. Each group is represented by their 'spoke' – they communicate to the meeting through him or her, allowing hundreds of people to be represented by fewer voices. The combination of small groups and spokescouncil allows everyone to be involved in the process without having to be part of every discussion. Small groups can be formed randomly or on the basis of, for example, affinity groups, where people live or shared language.

### Spokescouncil outline

#### Typical Spokescouncil



(steps 1 and 2 can take place in advance within the individual small groups)

**As a whole group:**

1. Unless you're certain everyone is experienced and fluent in the consensus process you're using, explain consensus and spokescouncil process to the assembled small groups.
2. Introduce the issue to be decided and give (or have someone else give) all the necessary information to make an informed decision. Provide time for clarification.
3. Clearly define the question(s) for decision.

**In small groups:**

4. Everyone voices their initial thoughts and reactions. What are the issues and concerns arising from the matter? You could use tools such as go-rounds or paired listening in the small groups to ensure everyone is heard.
5. In situations where there are obvious opposing views in the large group it will help if the small groups can discuss the initial thoughts of the other groups first before they start thinking of ideas – so you might break the small group discussion here and have feedback in the spokescouncil.
6. The next stage is to gather ideas about how the problem could be solved. Use tools like go-rounds or ideastorms (see our briefings on *Tools for Meetings* or the section in this briefing on *Facilitation Tools for Consensus*).
7. Then the small groups discuss the ideas they've come up with. What are the pros and cons? Some ideas get discarded at this stage, and new ideas may be formed.

**In the spokescouncil:**

8. Each spoke takes a turn to present the view of their group, covering the width of ideas, concerns as well as possible proposals. The spokes then have a discussion to try and incorporate the various possible proposals into one synthesised proposal. During this process the spokes may call 'time out' to confer with their group for clarification or to see whether a modified proposal would be acceptable to them.

**In small groups:**

9. The spokes report back on the discussion in the spokescouncil and present possible proposals. The groups discuss these and check for agreement and objections. Groups can also further modify the proposals.

**In the spokescouncil:**

10. Spokes meet back at the spokescouncil and check whether groups agree. If not all groups agree, the discussion continues and new proposals are formulated.

**In small groups or the whole group:**

11. If a consensus has been reached, the decision is implemented by all. Remember, deciding who will do what is an important part of the above process!

**The Spokes**

What the spoke is empowered to do in the spokescouncil is for their small group to decide. Sometimes a spoke may be mandated to make some or all decisions on behalf of the group. This is normally referred to as an *empowered spoke*. Other times the spoke can't make any decisions, and is just a channel of communication between their small group and the whole spokescouncil. Spokes should remember that they are speaking on the behalf of their group and not representing their personal point of view.

To avoid mistakes in the transfer of information, and to ensure clear communication between the small group and the spokescouncil, each group can send two spokes – one to speak at the council,

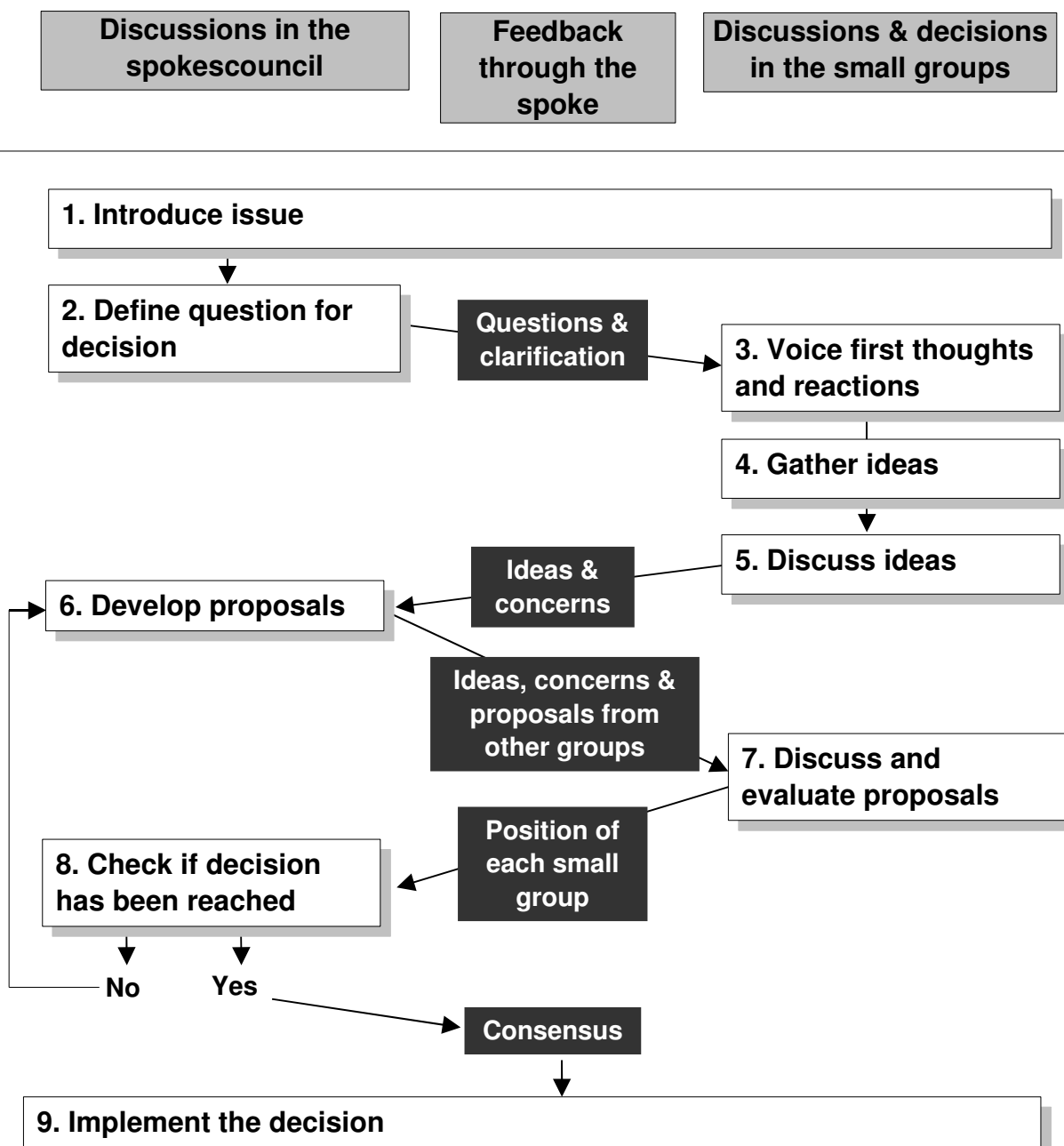
the other to listen and make a written record of the information and proposals. The role of the spoke can be rotated either during a meeting, or from one meeting to the next.

### Variations of a spokescouncil

To make the spokescouncil more accountable and reduce the need for repeating information, it can take place in the *fish bowl* format (see below), with the groups sitting in an outer circle around the spokes. Each group can sit directly behind their spoke, which makes it easier for the spoke to quickly check back with their group.

If the issue being discussed impacts very strongly on the needs of the people involved, then an additional step can be built in, where small groups give information on their particular needs via the spokescouncil before starting to gather ideas.

## A Model of Consensus using a Spokescouncil



## And finally...

Consensus is about participation and sharing power. It's a very powerful process for building communities and empowering individuals. Don't be discouraged if the going gets rough. For most of us consensus is a completely new way of making decisions. It takes time to unlearn the patterns of behaviour we have been brought up to accept as the norm. Consensus does get easier with practice and it's definitely worth giving it a good try.

For more briefings, and to find out about workshops look at our website:

**[www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)**

or contact:

**[lancaster@seedsforchange.org.uk](mailto:lancaster@seedsforchange.org.uk)**

**0845 330 7583**

**[oxford@seedsforchange.org.uk](mailto:oxford@seedsforchange.org.uk)**

**0845 459 4776**

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# Facilitating the Consensus Process

## What's happening?

### Clarification of the issue to be decided

What decision are we making?  
Is everyone clear on what we're deciding?  
Have we got enough info to make a good decision?

### Exploration & discussion of the issue generating ideas & proposals

What criteria are we using to make our decision?  
Are there any underlying conflicts? Are we resolving them?  
Are concerns being heard early to avoid blocks later?  
Is everyone that wants to be heard being heard?  
Are we all working towards a common goal?  
Are we using the language of consensus clearly?

### Emergence of a synthesised proposal

Is there an emerging proposal?  
Do we all understand the emerging proposal?

### Discussion, clarification & amendment of the proposal

Is it an amendment or a sneaky counter proposal?  
Are we using the language of consensus clearly?  
Is there an emerging consensus?

### Test for consensus

Is there an emerging consensus?  
"any blocks?"  
Is the block really a stand aside?  
Can the block be resolved?  
"any stand asides?"  
Are there too many stand asides?  
"are we all agreed?"  
Are you getting active agreement?

### Implementing the decision

Was agreement reached too easily?  
Who is doing what, by when?

## Possible tools to use

Agreed **agenda** with info circulated in advance where relevant

**Active listening, summarise & restate** for clarity

**Throwing back to the group** for agreement

**Handsignals, active agreement** to show understanding of the issue

**Ideastorm** to generate ideas

**Go round** to get initial thoughts/feelings

**Small groups, group**

**agreement, speakers list** to allow everyone to be heard

**Group agreement, active listening, restate** co-operative aims, **breaks & games**

to ensure respect and ease tension

Agreed **agenda** prioritised with the group, with times for each item to ensure all ideas heard

**Prioritisation tool** to narrow options down  
**Parking lot** to ensure no ideas get lost

**Active listening** to find common ground between people & ideas, **summarise & restate** for clarity

**Throwing back to the group**

**Handsignals, active agreement, go round** to show any emerging consensus

**Notetaking** to record wording of proposal

**Go round** to gauge support for proposals and elicit amendments

**Active listening, summarising & restating** for clarity

Period of **reflection** or a **break** before testing for agreement to allow for considered decision

**Summarising & restating** the proposal for clarity

**Throwing back to the group**

**Active listening** to any blocks & **reframing** the proposal if a block objects to the language used

If there's no agreement return to **parking lot** to remind group of ideas from earlier discussions

**Handsignals & active agreement** to gauge consensus/show agreement

**Notetaking** to record wording of decision

**Subgroups** delegated to undertake work

**Notetaking** to record who's agreed to do what, & by when

**Icebreaker** or **break** to re-energise group for the rest of the meeting agenda