

Model Consensus-Based Decision-Making Processes

A consensus based decision-making process is an effort in which affected parties (stakeholders) seek to reach agreement on a course of action to address an issue or set of related issues. In a consensus process, the stakeholders work together to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Each consensus process is unique because the parties design their agreement to fit their circumstances.

However, successful consensus processes follow several guiding principles:

- **Consensus Decision-Making**– Participants make decisions by agreement rather than by majority vote.
- **Inclusiveness**– To the extent possible, all necessary interests are represented or, at a minimum, approve of the decision.
- **Accountability**– Participants usually represent stakeholder groups or interests. They are accountable both to their constituents and to the process.
- **Facilitation**– An impartial facilitator accountable to all participants manages the process, ensures the ground rules are followed, and helps to maintain a productive climate for communication and problem solving.
- **Flexibility**– Participants design a process and address the issues in a manner they determine most suitable to the situation.
- **Shared Control/Ground Rules**– Participants share with the facilitator responsibility for setting and maintaining the ground rules for a process and for creating outcomes.
- **Commitment to Implementation** – All stakeholders commit to carrying out their agreement.

Elements of a Consensus-Based Decision

- All parties agree with the proposed decision and are willing to carry it out;
- No one will block or obstruct the decision or its implementation; and
- Everyone will support the decision and implement it.

Levels of Consensus

- I can say an unqualified “yes!”
- I can accept the decision.
- I can live with the decision.
- I do not fully agree with the decision, however, I will not block it and will support it.

Areas of consensus building where discussion and planning is needed:

- Mission and Vision of “Critical Gaps”
- Leadership and committee structure, including roles and responsibilities
- Estimated funding needs and how decisions about funding are made

- How prioritization of initiatives is achieved
- Timeline for work to be accomplished
- Communications strategies to be used within Critical Gaps structure as well as to external stakeholders

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