

CONSENSUS

WHAT IS CONSENSUS?

Consensus is an agreement:

everyone in the group considers the best possible mutually acceptable agreement;

and

everyone agrees to support.

Consensus is not the same as everyone's first choice – but it is an agreement that each participant finds acceptable and will support.

WHY USE A CONSENSUS PROCESS?

There are no losers in the consensus process.

In a majority vote process, there is usually a winning side and a losing side.

In a consensus process, no one is forced to agree to something that conflicts with his or her important interests. A consensus agreement therefore meets every participant's fundamental concerns.

Consensus leads to more creative solutions.

In a consensus process, every member has an incentive to listen to all other members, understand their concerns, and think of creative solutions that meet other participants' fundamental concerns, as well as their own..

In a "majority vote" process, if "your side" has the votes, there is little incentive to listen to others and there is no need to come up with new ideas that address the "losing" side's concerns.

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A consensus process encourages candor.

In traditional bargaining situations, participants are expected to have hidden agendas. In a consensus process, all participants are encouraged to share information and be candid about their interests.

Consensus helps to equalize power imbalances.

When a group is working by consensus, participants do not have to worry that another group is more “powerful” and can focus on developing sound, creative solutions.

Consensus agreements are more likely to be more workable and possible to implement.

When a diverse group reaches consensus, it has almost always taken into consideration the wide range of expertise and experience the group offers. This helps the participants anticipate problems and concerns in developing an agreement. This foresight usually results in agreements that are realistic and possible to implement.

When a diverse group reaches consensus and agrees to support the agreement, it is less likely that the agreement will be attacked as being one-sided.

Consensus processes are usually more efficient.

Sometimes participants are concerned that it will take “too long” to reach consensus. Although consensus discussions may take longer than a short debate and a majority vote, a consensus agreement usually saves time and money in the long run. When a majority vote model is used, the losing side has no buy-in and may continue to fight the decision by organizing opposition and fighting it in any way possible.