

Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship
Consensus Building Principles and Guidelines
March 2018

Definition of Consensus as a Proposal Development Process

The process of discussing and developing a proposal or agreement where collaboration, agreement seeking, inclusion, participation, input equality and solution mindedness are emphasized and participants are encouraged to place the wisdom of the whole group above individual preferences. Consensus emphasizes the role of the group in finding a solution together, not pitting stakeholders' interests against each other. Consensus building processes used during the proposal development and evaluation phases deliberately seek out objections, which reveal wisdom that can be used to improve proposals and agreements.

Principles of Proposal Development Using Consensus Building

1. Agreement seeking – consensus building process attempts to generate as much agreement as possible.
2. Inclusion – as many community members as possible should be involved in the process.
3. Participation – not only is everyone included, everyone is able to participate by contributing opinions and suggestions.
4. Collaboration – all people involved collaborate and build upon each other's concerns and suggestions.
5. Egalitarianism – everyone's input is equal.
6. Solution mindedness – collaboratively shape a proposal until it meets as many of the participants' concerns as possible.

Benefits of Using a Consensus Process

Proposal development using consensus building involves a collaborative process rather than an adversarial debate. Thus, a consensus process is more likely to result in all parties reaching common ground and provide these benefits:

1. Better decisions – because all perspectives are taken into account, the resulting proposals are therefore able to address all concerns affecting the decision as much as possible.
2. Better group relationships – through collaborating rather than competing, group members are able to build closer relationships through the process.
3. Better implementation of decisions – when widespread agreement is achieved and everyone has participated in the process, there is usually strong levels of cooperation in follow through. It is also less likely to have disgruntled "losers" who may undermine or passively sabotage the effective implementation of the group's decision.

Discernment Options - Definition

"Consent" – Consenting often indicates that you personally support a proposal. It may also indicate your understanding the group as a whole supports the proposal and you are choosing to place the group as a whole above your own preference by consenting to a proposal that it is not your personal preference.

"Stand Aside" – Stand aside may be registered for a number of reasons: 1) a participant has a serious disagreement with a proposal, but does not see the proposal as in opposition to the mission of the fellowship 2) a participant feels incapable of adequately understanding the group's thinking as a result of limited participation in the proposal development process.

"Oppose" – Oppose indicates a participant has a serious disagreement with a proposal and believes the adoption of the proposal is in opposition to the mission of the Fellowship. In the consensus building process, participants voice their thoughts during the discussion so that all ideas can be included as much as possible. The consensus building process deliberately seeks out objections, which reveal wisdom that can be used to improve proposals and agreements. In the end, since concerns about a proposal have been included in the process and the wisdom of those opposing a proposal has been used to modify the proposal as much as possible without losing meaningfulness of the proposal, opposition is minimized.