

- **Keep intervention to a minimum**—Intervene only in group discussions when it is necessary to interrupt behavior that is:
  - Impeding progress toward getting the task done without the agreement of the group
  - Off track in the discussion because someone is dominating
  - Physically dangerous

## Reaching Consensus

Consensus is a decision making style that reflects the ideas and thoughts of all team members. Reaching consensus helps ensure that decisions are explored thoroughly and that strong disagreements have been resolved. Although everyone in the group may not agree that the decision is the best solution, they can support the decision. To reach consensus major differences of opinion in the group must be addressed.

### Consensus is:

- A decision that is acceptable to everyone

### Consensus is not:

- Unanimity—a consensus may not represent everyone’s first choice
- Majority Vote—in a majority vote, some people win and others lose

### Consensus Requires:

- Time
- Communication skills such as active listening, questioning and probing
- Conflict management
- Viewing disagreements and positive conflict as part of the process
- Keeping an open mind and thinking creatively

### How it works—Steps and Tips

1. Agree on a targeted time period to reach consensus
2. The author presents the proposal as clearly as possible



3. Identify areas of agreement
4. Clearly state differences
  - State positions and perspectives as neutrally as possible
  - Do not associate positions with people—the differences are between alternative valid solutions or ideas, not between people
  - Summarize concerns and list them
5. Fully Explore Differences
  - Explore each perspective and clarify
  - Involve everyone in the discussion—avoid a one-on-one debate
  - Look for the ‘third way’—make suggestions or modifications or create a new solutions
6. Reach closure
7. Articulate the decision
  - Ask people if they feel they have had the opportunity to fully express their opinions
  - Obtain a sense of the group—this can be done with the following processes
    - a. ‘go round’ - go around and ask people how they are feeling about the proposal
    - b. ‘straw poll’ – ask people if they could support the proposal as it currently stands
    - c. ‘Fist to Five’ – *See Appendix D for Consensus building process*
  - If people respond in a tentative, mildly supportive or with an indicator or less than two repeat steps three through five until you can take another poll
  - At this point poll each person asking “do you agree with and will you support this decision?”

## Tips for consensus building

### *Do’s*

- Try to get underlying assumptions regarding the situation out into the open where they can be discussed.
- Listen and pay attention to what others have to say—This is the most distinguishing characteristics of successful teams



- Encourage others, particularly the quieter ones, to offer ideas— Remember, the team needs all the information it can get
- Take the time needed to reach the point where everyone can agree to support the group's decision.

### ***Don'ts***

- Do not vote  
Voting will:
  - split the team into 'winners and losers'
  - encourage 'either or' thinking when there may be other ways
  - foster argument rather than rational discussion
- Do not make agreements too quickly or compromise too early in the process—easy agreements are often based on erroneous assumptions that need to be challenged
- Do not compete internally—either the team wins or no one wins

Consensus is a useful tool and can be used with groups as small as 5 and as large as 500,000. It has been used in many decision making situations including making policy for a country's government.

