

WHAT IS CONSENSUS?¹

- Achieving consensus is a process that begins with multiple points of view and ends with mutual agreement. Consensus aligns the power of the group to get things done. You can say that you have reached consensus when you can answer yes to the following:
 - The agreement (or decision or solution or plan) meets or exceeds your needs as well as each of the other group members' needs.
 - The agreement addresses the objective of the discussion.
 - Everyone in the group will work to support the agreement.
- There are many ways to reach a decision other than consensus. Two common methods are *majority rule* and *unilateral decisions* (with or without input from the group). Both of these:
 - get to a decision faster than working to consensus.
 - are less complex than using consensus and therefore easier to explain and use.
 - decrease the possibility that the best/most creative decision has been made.
- Some useful guidelines for consensus:
 - Check in regularly with everyone in the group to make sure everyone participates and that you are all on the same path.
 - Build on ideas; do not discount, over-ride, or focus on what is wrong with them.
 - Encourage discussion of ideas.
 - Work primarily with facts/data, but also take values/feelings into account.
 - Stay focused on the desired outcomes/interests vs. arguing your position.
 - Make sure the desired outcomes are as specific as possible.
 - Identify how you will measure the outcomes.
- The following are interpersonal skills that support consensus. Do a self-review:
 1. I arrive prepared to discuss the issue and my position.
 2. During the discussion I say what is on my mind.
 3. I stay focused on the purpose of the decision.
 4. I treat different opinions as a positive part of the discussion.
 5. I help clarify what has been said and make sure all points have been heard.
 6. I avoid the urge to rush to an immediate solution.
 7. I work for the best decision, not just my preferred choice.
 8. I address conflict when it surfaces in the discussion.
 9. When conflict arises, I confront ideas and issues, not people.
 10. I express my views honestly, without attacking anyone else.
 11. I agree with the final decision only if I plan to support its implementation.

¹ See *Achieving Consensus: Tools and Techniques*, by Jon Scott and Eileen Flanigan, CRISP Publications, Inc., 1996.