Jason Diceman's

<u>Consensus Decision-Making Booklet</u>

File name and version:
Consensus_Decision-Making_Booklet_0-02-03.doc

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Introduction

This booklet is a collection of suggestions for improving the democratic consensus decision-making process within a group

The suggestions given here are meant for semi-stable groups of adults that are sensible, disciplined and serious about finding agreement and cooperating. Groups with between 8 to 60 active members can directly make use of the suggestions here. The more members that wish to participate in every group meeting, the more difficult the process becomes. Groups larger than about 60 require special communication technology (e.g. Internet systems) to attempt effective consensus democracy. Groups smaller then 8 do not require such formal methods to reach agreement. That said, a group of any size could probably find some of the ideas here at least helpful when determining their own democratic methods.

It is also possible for very large groups to form smaller groups that have extensive contracts. Contracts can be negotiated by transparent representative committees and must be accepted by all group members. But such contracting is not discussed in this version of the booklet.

The goal of this booklet is not to name and define every role members may play or every social dynamic that may take place. Nor will I attempt to explain or prescribe the cognitive activities of decision-makers. I am simply trying to recognize some of the most important and observable aspects of successful group decision-making. I aim to empower groups with language, systems, technology and ideas that they may choose to use as they see fit. I leave it to the groups to decide what suggestions to attempt and what to ignore.

This project will focus on groups that do the majority of their decision-making in face-to-face meetings. This seems to be the preferred method of deliberation in most of the groups I have come in to contact with. For my work in Internet based decision making, please visit: www.communicationism.org

Many of the ideas presented here are informed and inspired by the different intentional communities I visited in Denmark, April 2002. Other ideas are drawn directly from the work of The Center for Conflict Resolution and Food Not Bombs. My ideas are also drawn from several years of media studies and my own personal experience in decision-making groups.

That said, I must admit that I have never fully participated in a long-term consensus decision-making group. How much this fact hampers my ability to make constructive suggestion I leave for you to decide.

Good luck with your group.

 - Jason Diceman -

Why Consensus Democracy?

A decision for a group is considered good when it **meets the needs and interests** of <u>all</u> the group members, when the group **enthusiastically supports** it and when it can be most **easily put into action**. Consensus democracy aims to achieve these goals with every decision. Consensus democracy uses open deliberation to find the best solutions to problems. In order to satisfy all members of the group, every decision is forced to be of **excellent quality, carefully examined, clearly workable, desirable and well though out.** The mutual satisfaction **promotes commitment to decisions and reduces resentment**.

The emphasis on creativity, equality, consideration, cooperation and agreement means that every decision will be the optimal and most fair option for the group.

The next alternatives to deliberative consensus democracy is majority rule. The main problem with majority rule is that it creates the opportunity for oppression of the minority by the majority. Another concern is the voting tends to be a very shallow and binary form of democratic participation. Poorly constructed ballets, badly timed referendums and ignorant or misinformed participants can all cause the majority rules voting mechanism to fail in expressing the communities real interests and preferences. Open deliberation does not impose the mechanical restrictions and dangerous tendencies of majority voting.

Glossary of Important Terms

Active listening:
Seek to understand what the speaker is trying to communicate. Being attentive. Asking for clarification. Confirming understanding. Being open to rational persuasion. Concentrating on understanding before thinking about counter arguments.

Agenda:
A document that specifies what will be discussed during a group meeting.

Blocking:
When one or more individuals opposes an otherwise agreed-upon decision that has been thoroughly discussed through a group meeting. Blocking is when an important concern has not been resolved and the supporters of the concern refuse to stand-aside.

Constitution:
A document that all group members agree to. The constitution defines the group and usually provides a greater vision for the group.

Conflict:
When members discover incongruent opinions on a common subject. Conflict is a normal part of any decision-making process. When dealt with in a spirit of cooperation, conflict is an opportunity for greater understanding and improved solutions. When dealt with in a spirit of competition, conflict is often destructive and painful.

Cooperation:
The pooling of energy, resources, intelligence, and skills into collaborative efforts that yields grater results then the sum of their parts. It is a combination of people that are work as one. Cooperation is the basis of ever healthy society and is founded on empathy.

Competition: The separation of energy, resources, intelligence, and skills into fragments that aim to succeed over others. Competition is founded on selfishness and individuality of persons and groups.

Consensus:

The consent of all group members. This does not necessitate enthusiastic satisfaction from all members, but at least united acceptance.

Concerns:
These are statements that raise a question, or point out a challenge or problem in a proposal. Concerns should be presented in the context of a certain stakeholder's interests. Concerns should include an explanation of the reasoning behind the concern. Any participant can bring up concerns.

Creativity:
The practice of using diverse knowledge, intuition, exploration, insight, and experience to create new possibilities that were previously not acknowledged.

Democracy:
Government by the people. It is a form of decision-making, control and organization that aims to distribute power equally amongst all the people. Ideally, the only restrictions on people within a democracy are restrictions each person has accepted on to themselves. Some related keywords: liberty, freedom, equality, opportunity, justice, and cooperation.

Experts:
People who have an above average knowledge in a specific field of significance. They usually have experience, training, education, and/or an enthusiasm for the field of significance. They are useful for giving the group greater insight into their specific field of significance. They may be internal or external to the group and may act as impartial resources or active stakeholders.

Group:
A group is simply a collection of people that aim to work in cooperation. Some examples of groups include: a workers co-op, a household, an non-governmental organization, a not-for-profit business or most importantly, a community.

Interests:
A group's or individual's underlying values and needs. Interests are the core goals that decision-making aims to fulfill. By focusing on interests rather then requests, groups are open to more options for satisfying the real needs of the people and supporting their fundamental beliefs. For example: an employee who is also a good mother might request a higher wage, but her interest is more likely to be security and opportunity for her child. Once we realize this fundamental interest, other opportunities become apparent, such as company paid insurance plans and scholarships.

Information:
Clearly stated and commonly agreed upon facts. Information can be presented in any number of ways (e.g. chart, paragraphs, reports, etc). Information should be made easily accessible to the whole and placed in the context of the issues they relate to. Information is one of the key resources for sensible decision-making.

Information Facilitators:
These are the individuals that come to the meeting with large amounts of organized documentation that may be referenced through out the meeting.

Linguistic Facilitators:
These are the impartial individuals skilled at drawing out, understanding and communicating the meaning of others. The may offer services such as rephrasing, summarizing, clarifying, relating and combining of different messages presented by participants. These people make issues, concerns, proposals and other elements **explicit**, i.e. they will clarify and label an idea or collection of ideas

Minutes:

The detailed notes documenting what communication took place during a meeting. It is a good idea to make these as specific and accurate as possible for future reference, conflict resolution and clarification. Main points, key decision and important information should be highlighted and made easily accessible to the entire group. Minutes are most useful for those who have missed a meeting. Minutes should be accepted by all members of the group before entered into record. This can be done by distributing the minutes of a meeting after it is complete but before the next meeting. At the following meeting, the first item on the agenda could be to approve the last meetings minutes.

Moderators:
These are ideally impartial individuals who **enforce the structure of a meeting**. This position is also known as the Chair. They call on speakers, follow the agenda, and generally act a central guide for the meeting.

Monitors:
These are the impartial individuals who attempt to take a step back from the meeting to recognize larger patterns, trends and issues on the meta-level of the meeting. That is to say, they are not so concerned with what is being discussed, but how it is being discussed. These people keep facilitators and moderators in check. It is their special responsibility to recognize and address more environmental, systemic, structural, personal and emotional issues that may be effecting discussions.

Participants:
These are the general members of a meeting. They may include members of the group, external experts, or outside stakeholders. Participants are responsible for agreeing to the constitution and knowing the meeting guidelines and procedures. As individuals they are expected to represent their different preferences, biases, perspectives and interests. But as members of a consensus building team, they are also expected to think tribally and aim for mutually acceptable situations.

      Monitors, Facilitators, Recorders and other institutional roles may also participate to some degree, but this will most likely affect their ability to concentrate on their assigned task and act impartially within that task.

Policy:
An agreed upon way of doing things. A formal statement the defines how the group should proceed in the case of a certain kind of situation. Examples of policy types: safety, conflict resolution, food distribution, economic, working hours, communication methods, etc.

Proposals:
Clearly stated suggestions for action that take into account all presented information and attempt to satisfy all stakeholder interests presented to the group. Proposals must also fall within the framework of what is practically possible for the group and desirable under the group constitution.

Precedent:
Principles established by previous decisions. The amount of precedent a decision will set should be part of the decision-making process. Decisions made by a well-deliberated and strong consensus should set more precedent then a hurried majority vote.

Reformulation:
The interactive process of discovering an improved mutual judgment. It is the emergence of new common agreements where there used to be difference. It is the redefinition or reframing of the current item for discussion. It is the combining, modifying, rephrasing, adjusting and reorganizing of issues, questions, proposals and ideas in general. It is not necessarily a compromise. It is when, through discussion, the meeting realizes new options that matches all parties' interests. Reformulation through group discussion is the essence of consensus decision-making.

Reflection:
This time spent thinking about an item outside of discussion. The human mind has a way of gaining improved understanding of an issue even without discussion or the input of further information. Reflection is this process which allows the mind to make connections and come to grips with the necessary ideas. It often leads to a more clear view of the ideas and potential options. It allows people to think free from disruption and without concern for making an immediate decision.

Reflection is usually achieved between meetings. On occasion, the moderator or someone else may suggest a moment of silence for reflection, especially during a heated debated. This often helps people open their minds to others' views and to take a less competitive stance.

Reporters/clerks:
These are the impartial individuals who record the minutes of the meeting and maintain the group documents (such as the constitution and precedents).

Stand Aside:
The decision by a meeting participant to allow a proposal to go through even though their concerns have not been resolved. Standing aside shows that the concern still exists, but it is perceived not to be of such a grave nature that it should stop the group from making a decision. The alternative to standing aside is *blocking* consensus.

Stakeholders:
These are people that will be affected by a decision. There are many degrees by which a person could be affected by a decision. For example: a municipality's decision to promote biking rather then cars affects its traveling citizens, local car industry, local bike industry and all breathing animals. How much weight is given to each stakeholders interests should be openly set in relation to the group's culture.

Shelve:
This is the decision to not continue discussing an agenda item. This generally means that item is temporarily ignored and potentially forgotten forever. All documentation pertaining to the item should still be kept, just in case it is ever introduced again. This does not necessarily cancel related proposals or activities. The group meeting should explicitly define what repercussions shelving will have.

Technical Facilitators:
These are the impartial individuals skilled at designing, setting up, using and maintaining the instruments of communication used in a meeting. Different skills may include the set-up of projectors and PA systems, the designing of effective slide shows, design of reports, design, printing and distribution of voting ballots and other the expert use of communication tools.

Tentative:
Being tentative is presenting and discussing ideas in a careful but uncertain way until explicit agreement is reached. It is not assuming a statement is fully correct, but discussing it to see if it is. Being tentative is an important part of consensus discussion because it reduce conflict over ideas before they are even understood and always leaves room for confirmation and improved understanding. It allows people to discuss different options without assuming anyone of them is correct. From this process, agreement will form around what ideas seem to match with the group's stated needs.

Transparency:
The workings of the group should be visible to all members. People should know why decisions were made and why policies stand. All information, procedures, agendas, rules, records and meetings should be easily accessible (and possibly promoted) to all group members, stakeholders (and possibly the public which are almost always stakeholders to some degree).

Working Group

Either an already formed or ad-hoc collection of people responsible for a certain set of tasks. Working groups put plans into action. These people have a defined set of goals they must achieve and a limited jurisdiction for autonomous decision-making. They may structure themselves as a flat democracy or some form of cooperative hierarchy. Their activities should be transparent to the group.

Creating an Environment for Consensus Democracy

Consensus democracy is more of a mindset then a procedure. It is communication where the participants aim for understanding and mutual acceptance. It is discussion in the spirit of cooperation. It is meeting to search for and realize what are common goods for the whole group. It is the desire for unanimity.

Like all good democratic processes, consensus decision-making is about giving people choice and control over their own lives. This means that consensus can only be found when people choose to agree on something. To improve the likelihood and efficiency of realizing common understanding and finding a unanimous agreement, the group needs to not only follow a process that promotes consensus, it must also develop a culture that promotes consensus, a structure that allows for it, and a constitution to base it on.

Group Culture

The people of the group create group culture. Culture includes the common history, language, patterns, ideas, traditions, ideologies, expectations and assumptions of the group. Culture can not be controlled, but can be guided by inspiring members, traditions and special texts (e.g. a constitution, charter, sacred book, etc.)

For a group to practice consensus democracy they must have a culture that **encourages cooperation, sharing, teamwork, equality, solidarity, empathy, trust, honesty, and unity**. They must have **common goals, values and understandings**. They need to have **equal control** over important aspects of their community and **mutual awareness** of their world. Without these qualities discussion will lead to competition, power struggles, misunderstandings, and other kinds of conflict.

Some techniques for improving the cooperative, egalitarian, communal and cohesive qualities of group culture include:

- Attend informal, non-competitive social gatherings (e.g. meals, single team games, celebrations) to improve the sense of community and friendship
- Increase public communication (i.e. messages shared by the whole group) so members have more common understandings.
- Recognize and celebrate common aspects of the group
- Reward people who are generous, humble and empathetic.
- Promote transparency within the group. The more people know about each others activities and motives, the more trust and accountability the group will gain.
- Suggest the use of tribal language with terms such as: "the community", "us", "we", "ours".
- Discourage elitism and other forms of segregation or discrimination.

A most important aspect of cooperation is a willingness to attend the consensus decision-making process. They need to be interested and willing to practice the process and work on their participation skills. At times this process can seem frustrating, but the group must trust that the process is necessary for genuine democracy to be practiced. But this trust in the process should not be a blind faith. Every group member needs to understand and be critical of the process, and only trust it because they know it is a good process. To maintain this critical trust, the process should also be regularly refined and improved.

Beyond these community values, a group culture should also promote professionalism, quality work, and simple efficiency. Tasks should be completed in ways that are reliable and will not require more work of the group to repair later. Members should be encourage to use their energy wisely and efficiently, so to give each individual and the group as whole, more free time and energy.

Group Structure

Jurisdiction

Functionally, the group can only apply consensus decision-making over aspects of the world that the group has control over. Anything controlled by private, individual, or external bodies, is not within the

jurisdiction of a consensus group. Within a community, the more that is publicly owned and controlled, the more the community can practice democracy.

Equality

The group must aim for equality. This doe not mean that talents should be suppressed, but that everyone should have equal opportunity to use their talents. Resources should be fairly distributed. Communication and judgment skills should be taught to all members. Members should interact as equals.

If people within the group have power over others group members, they can use this power to limit discussions and suppress concerns others would have brought up. For the consensus process to work for all the interests in the meeting, there cannot be levels of hierarchy and authority. There may be experts, organizers, seniors and delegated responsibilities, but no one person can have power over how other participate in the decision-making process. Each person must be able to contribute and speak freely without fear of oppression from authorities. The process cannot work effectively if authorities are able veto group decisions or restrict the options for action.

The **highest level of authority** in a consensus democracy group **is the group meeting**.

A Living Constitution

A constitution is a form of **contract** that each member has with the whole group. It is usually in the form of a **document** that was first written by the group founders.   The group constitution should specify all the important aspects of the group that the people **share in common**. It makes the **mutual agreements and joint interests** within the group explicit to all. The idea of a constitution being a *living* constitution, means it is always **open to modification** and is considered most legitimate immediately after being ratified by the group. It is a collaborative work in progress that represents the group's most current thinking. What is included or not included in the constitution is completely decided by the group meeting.

A good constitution also helps modify culture through the **discussion and recognition of bonds within the group**. Not only is it powerful tool for decision-making, but it also encourages a spirit of communal understanding and cooperation. It serves as form of **filter** and **reference** that all levels and stages of group practice should be processed through and checked against. It allows decision-makers to access the entire groups opinion without necessarily calling a meeting.

The goal is to have the constitution accurately represent the group. Every incongruence between the constitution and the group it represents, is a weakness and point of failure in the system. The constitution is only as valuable as it is representative of the group.

Some important notes:
- The constitution is contract the group members have with each other that defines all the important agreements they have.
- To be a member of the group and enjoy all that comes with it, each adult member must continually agree to the text and meaning of the constitution. Ignorance of the constitution is denial of full community membership and voting rights.
- It should it be in the form of **phases of priorities**. These priorities will make decision-making over competing interests and activities much simpler.
- **Proposals** are **reformulated** to best **compliment the current constitution**.
- The constitution is the official reference for defining the group's **general will**.
- Group policies and practices found not to compliment the constitution should be updated to match the current constitution.
- Issues that are not addressed by the constitution, should be dealt with by the group meeting, or by persons delegated to address them by the group meeting.
- Each decision by the group can set a form of precedence.
    - The amount of precedence set is defined by the group meeting.
- Recognized **trends and patterns of precedence** should be integrated into the constitution.

- The constitution should be **continually updated, refined, defined and clarified by the group meeting**.
- Groups can make contracts with other groups, as long as every item of the contract matches with each groups constitution.
- Persons can be apart of multiple groups.
- Where decisions are made that conflict with the constitution, either the constitution must be modified, or the community is undemocratic and a farce.

Changes to the constitution are considered very important but are conducted just like any other decision. A group is first formed under the fundamental agreements of:

1. **Listen to each other and seek agreement with each other**
2. **Cooperate so that we may all benefit more from the group.**

After the group is formed, **amendments to the constitution should be numerous and often**. Only after the group has attained true identity and progressive stability, should amendments to the constitution be rare.
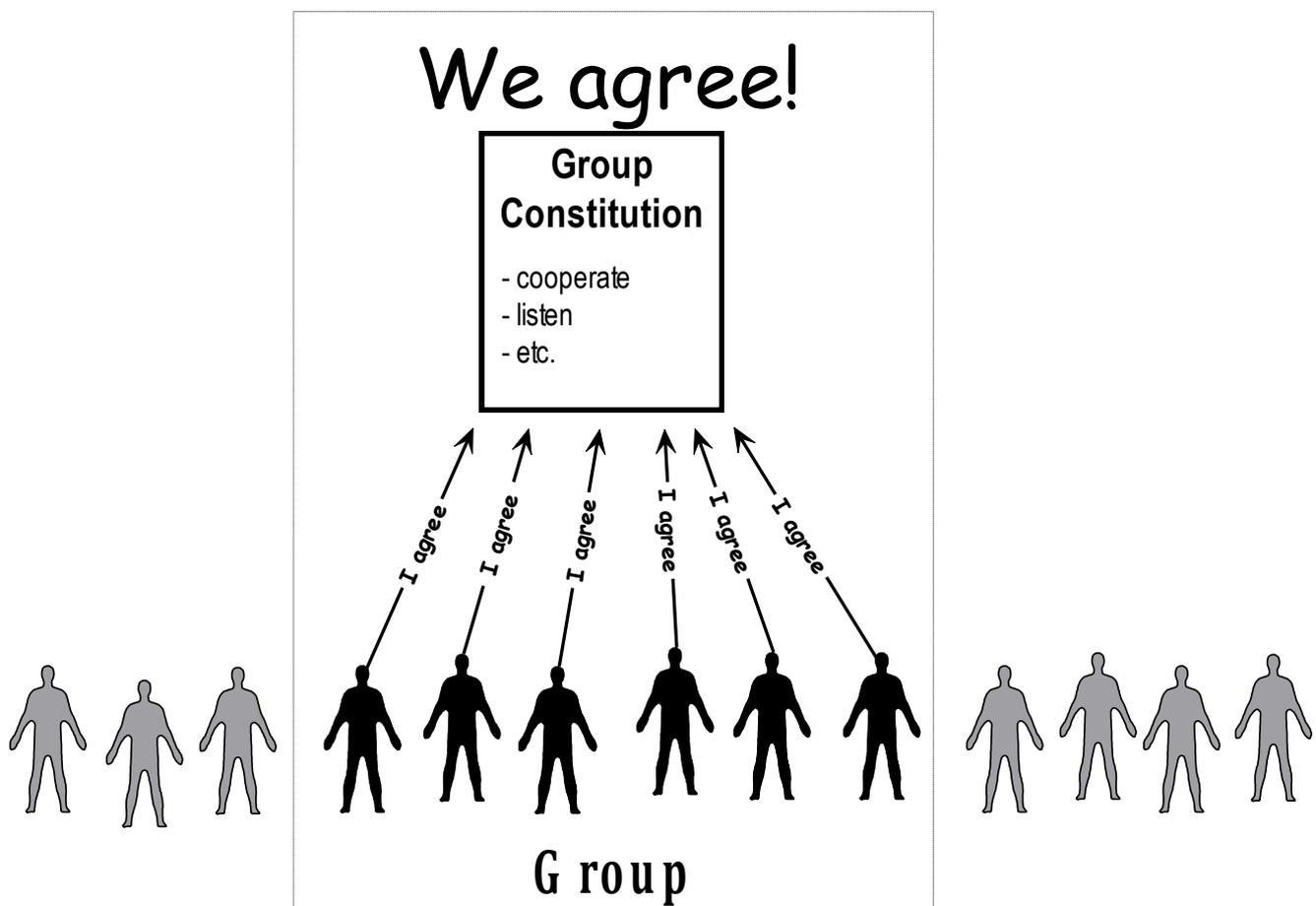
Defining the Group

Figure 1- Defining the Group

Group Communication

Communication is the bridge that allows group members to cooperate. While the group meeting is the space for consensus decision-making, informal and printed communication is the key to ensuring the decision-making is well informed and the plans for action are successfully followed through. Different examples for out of meeting group communication can include: conversations, newsletters, bulletin boards, public notebooks, email lists, websites, voice mail, telephone hotlines, short-message-services and more. Whatever means of communication are used, all members should have easy and regular access and should know how and for what each medium is used.

General Suggestions

- Listen and consider all related ideas and concerns from members and stakeholders
- Save meetings for decision-making. Use other means (e.g letters or bulletins) for information distribution
- Aim to find truth, common agreement and mutual acceptance.
- Strive for win-win proposals that require the least amount of sacrifice or compromise from all parties, yet achieve all parties goals.
- The comparing, relating and amalgamating of ideas, not the competition of ideas.
- Avoid individual authorship and attribution of ideas. Buy acknowledging that every idea is the result of communication, persons can accept that ideas are formed and held commonly. This reduces competition for control and credit over ideas brought up in the decision-making process.
- Avoid polarization of opinions, cliquing or the formation of parties. This will lead to competitive discourse, which is the antithesis of consensus decision-making.
- Dig deeper to uncover the real cause of conflicts, the reasoning supporting concerns and the interests behind requests. In general, attempt to address the source of an issue, not its symptoms or superficial appearance and effects.
- Recognize the assumptions that support a decision,
- Creative problem solving.
- Balancing efficiency with quality. Aim to be clear and succinct.
- Only apply communication rules that make sense and are proven to be constructive for the group.
- Be critical of communication methods and don't be afraid to experiment
- Discuss actions not assumed intentions.
- Choose your communications wisely so time and energy are not wasted.
- Ensure all group members know which channels to use for what kind of communication.
- Ensure all ideas are examined critically, but not so far as to needlessly restrict progress.
- Identify necessary and helpful information for making a decision as early as possible. Delegate the task of researching and reporting such information.
- Include contingencies in proposals (i.e. If (a) then do (b), if (c) then do (d), etc.)
- Avoid positions of authority. Institutional roles (e.g. the moderator) should be understood only as a guide, not an authority. Like any participant, experts can provide suggestions but they cannot dictate a decision.
- Be polite, respectful and sensitive of other people's feelings.
- Arrive to meetings on time and don't plan to leave until the meeting is complete.
- Be patient and take the time to understand and discuss each issue thoroughly. Don't rush discussion.
- Agree to the style and form for a formal discussion before entering it. This is especially important to make sure people respect the roles of institutional figures and to ensure people are not offended or annoyed by the process.
- Conflict is normal and should be seen as an opportunity for better understanding and improved solutions.
- When confused, ask questions.

- Try to balance group needs with the needs of individual members and outside stakeholders. Ideally they should be congruent and not in competition.
- Avoid blame and intimidation.
- First focus on the positive aspects of a suggestion given. Negative aspects may naturally be eliminated through reformulation.
- Be aware of your own assumptions and state them when appropriate..
- Aim to be transparent. Do not hide your goals.
- Be consistent in your communication methods, terms used and assumptions.
- Avoid terms that others may not be able to understand, unless you are willing to explain them (e.g. slang, euphemisms, jargon, acronyms, loaded words, very ambiguous expressions, etc.)
- Keep a note pad with you and write down your ideas and notes. By quickly recording your ideas on paper, you can forget about them and concentrate on the speakers until there is an appropriate opportunity to present it.

Improving Clarity and Understanding:

- Ask questions
- Define terms
- Rephrase others ideas to confirm and reinforce understanding
- Have a common document (e.g. white board, overhead, flip charts) of main discussion points. This serves as a form of 'collective memory' for the group.
- Use graphics, charts, maps, icons and other visual tools to help visual communicate ideas
- Give specific examples
- Silently rehearse or better yet, write down your point before attempting to address the group

Important Formal Group Communication Tools

There are many different ways messages can be exchanged within a group. Talking in a meeting may be appropriate for some kinds of messages, but not for all. Below are some suggestions for effective use of different communication tools.

	Group Meeting	Newsletter	Bulletin Board	Mail Boxes	Common Notebook	Binder	SMS	Email	Radio
Group Decision-Making - setting policy, updating constitution, finding agreements, resolving issues, etc.	☐								
Simple Announcements - calling a meeting, event & new policy reminders, etc.		☐	☐		☐		☐	☐	☐
Detailed Announcements - new policies, recent Constitutional Amendments,		☐	☐	☐				☐	
Tracking Work - progress of working groups		☐	☐						
Archive Documentation - minutes, agendas, precedents, plans, calendars, information, etc.						☐			
Directed Requests - questions for specific parties				☐					
General Requests - for information, assistance, resources, etc.			☐		☐		☐	☐	☐
Coordination - schedules, delegation, plans, etc.	☐	☐	☐						
Distribute Information - agenda, plans, Constitution, references		☐	☐	☐					
General Suggestions/Comments		☐	☐		☐			☐	☐
"X" the boxes for which tools your group will use for what purposes.									

Figure 2 - Formal Group Communication Tools

Bulletin Boards

The effective use of bulletin boards, posters and other form of static public media can improve internal communication, committee transparency and take strain off the group meeting. Bulletin boards allow group members to post information only once to reach the whole group. Besides saving paper, bulletin boards also allow others to publicly post responses.   Bulletin boards can be used for:
- Announcing meeting time and place
- Announcing events, new policies, constitutional amendments and other news
- Releasing Agendas
- Asking questions (e.g. Requesting information and opinions)
- Publicizing minutes from meetings
- Publicizing the progress of work delegated to a person or committee
- And much more...

Generally, the larger and/or more complex the group, the more bulletin board space it will require. It is better to have too much space then too little.

Example of Potential Bulletin Board Design
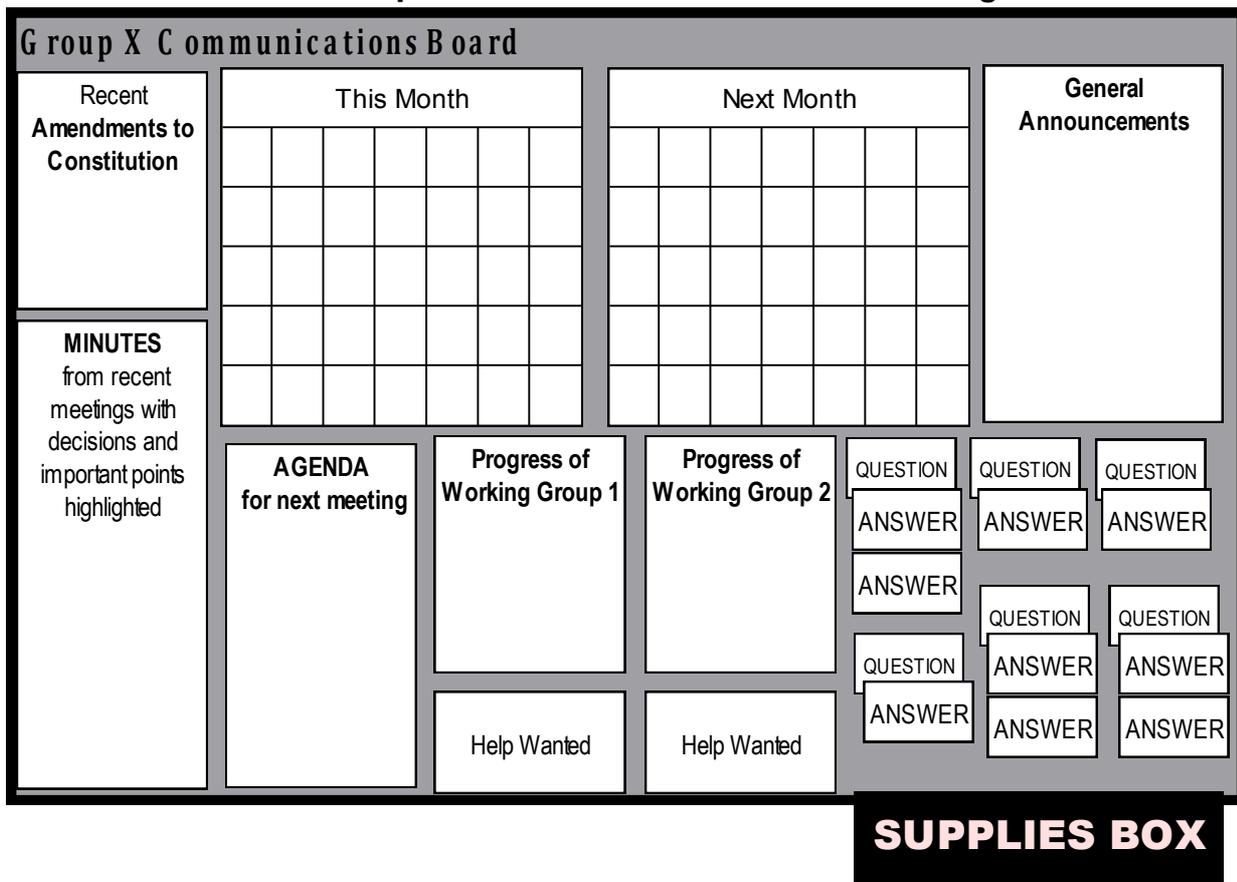
Figure 3 - Example of Potential Bulletin Board Design

To be effective, the bulletin board should be popularly read, well organized and respected by everyone uses it. Ideally, it should be in a safe place that is central to the whole group. The board should include a supplies box filled with thumb tacks, cue cards, sticky notes, markers, highlighters and stings. These supplies can be used to quickly add notes to the board, comment on specific posts, bring attention to specific notes and linking different notes (using tacks and string).

Newsletter

For groups that more geographically dispersed, a frequently mailed newsletter can serve the same function as a bulletin board. A dedicated committee should delegated to administer the amalgamation, printing and distribution of the newsletter. The newsletter committee should have a central email, post box, phone (with voice mail), and/or fax service so there are many simple options for sending messages to be included in the newsletter.

Common Notebook

A simple notebook placed in a common area can serve as an excellent tool for group communication of short messages. Any member can submit a message and others can reply. This is most useful for short announcements, requests and questions. Some suggested guidelines for using a common notebook system could inculde:
- Always keep a pen with the notebook
- Any submissions that have been addressed should be crossed off by the original author
- Write clearly and concisely.
- If the system seems to be abused or not effective, address the issue in the group meeting

Mail Boxes

To submit information to the Executive Committee (e.g. agenda items, votes, suggestions) they need a commonly accessible inbox. Personal and committee boxes are also useful for non-public communication. But it is generally a better option to use a public medium (e.g. bulletin board or meeting) to communicate with committees. This makes their work more transparent and can reduce the redundancy of questions and answers.

Documentation

By recording information, minutes, decision, plans and other related messages in writing, the group can promote a better understanding and more reflection on the ideas. Decisions that establish precedents should be documented with extra care and referenced in future related discussion. The use of documentation promotes continuity of decisions and the building of harmonious systems. Documentation that is incomplete, out of context, no longer reflect the interests, situation or spirit of the group should be recognized as such and thus treated in this light (i.e. don't base new decisions on old decisions that reflect a different situation).

Documentation can be achieved in many different ways:
- Ensure some long term group members memorize communication (not recommended for humans)
- Collect all relevant notes in a binder, organize, and label for quick reference
- Publish all notes on a group computer network
- Post documents on a public bulletin board
- Distribute notes as a newsletter
- Have an organized filling cabinet.

Different methods of documentation can be used in parallel, to improve accessibility, publicity and security of documents.

Documentation is only useful if read and referenced. Members should get copies of the most important documents for reading and reflection on their own time. This should include agendas, proposals in progress, the constitution and possibly some precedents. Be careful not to overload members with too much documentation.

Informal

Informal communication is the space for creating social bonds, friendships and relating general information. Groups should be given ample opportunities to meet informally, such as parties and get-togethers. Their should be a clear distinction between the formal meetings and informal gatherings.

In general, it is OK to lightly discuss items outside of formal meetings and documentation. The key is make public any insight or information gained through informal discussion. No group decisions can be made in

Group Meetings

These are suggested procedures that a group meeting should follow in order to practice effective consensus democracy. Important sections here are expanded upon later in the booklet. All group members should be clearly aware of these procedures (and other suggestions) before entering the process.

Potential Meeting Communication Tools

CONSTITUTION
PRECEDENTS
MINUTES ARCHIVE
other relevant info.

Clipboard

Item 1 water the plants
Item 2 Eating the Plants
Black/White Board

Item 1
Item 2
Flip Chart

Overhead Projector

Digital Projector

Information Facilitator

Reporter

MINUTES

Technical Facilitator

Group Meeting

Moderator

AGENDA

Linguistic Facilitator

Expert on Topic B

Expert on Topic A

External Stakeholder

Monitor

Figure 4 - Group Meeting

Calling a Meeting

The method for calling a meeting should be known by all members. Some potential methods include:

- Posters in common space
- A message in a newsletter
- Letters in members mail boxes
- Short-message-service
- Email

Meetings should be as often as necessary. In time of intense decision-making (e.g. when the group is first formed, or in times of struggle or transition) there may be a need for daily meetings.   When things are quite stable and no new issues arise, only a monthly meeting may be necessary. Even when the group is not meeting, it can still use other communication means (e.g. newsletters and bulletin boards) to remain in contact.

People and the Meeting Space

- Confirm that everyone feels safe and comfortable.
- Ensure all members needs have been accounted for so that they may participate to their best abilities.
- Make sure everyone see and hear each other clearly.
- Arrange seating positions so there is a sense of equality.
- Remove any distractions that will hinder peoples' ability to concentrate and communicate (e.g. TV, food, kids, other non-meeting people).

Follow the constitution

All stages of preparation and discussion should be referenced against the constitution. This will provide guidance, filters and checks to unsure the process always continues within the interests and agreements of the group. Other documents such as agenda setting procedures and meeting guidelines should also be referenced.

Attendance

Ideally, all members of the group should attend all meetings. But such a demand is impractical. A more reasonable request is ask people to attend the decision-making discussions that they are important can could give constructive input. As well, all direct stakeholders, institutional figures (e.g. the moderator, reporter) and those whose office is held responsible for the area of discussion.

If the meeting process is fair and effective, and if the group culture is cooperative and cohesive, people will attend the meetings on their own volition. They will realize the power and quality of results the democracy has and what benefits it provides them individually and as a group. They will want to discuss and vote because they know it empowers them and gives them a collective organized strength that overcomes any challenge.   **When democracy works, people attend.**

To begin, the first group members must have a faith and patience with the system that must be tailored, and the members that must learn the process. Once the system starts working effectively, it should not be so much of a struggle.

New members, whom as members already fully understand and agree to the constitution, must also learn the communication systems before attempting to use them. Part of this learning should be non-participatory attendance of a meeting with a tutor who can explain what is happening and answer questions. Once a new member seems to understand the process and the cultures of the meeting, they should be invited to fully participate in meetings.

Institutional Roles

Institutional roles are created to ensure that every meeting has at least a minimum of professional, organized and experienced members. These people coordinate and take care of the meeting process details so that the participants can focus on the discussion at hand.

The different institutional roles require diligence, concentration, and all around professionalism. Learning how to fulfill a role well is partially done through reading books like this, but is better learnt from experienced and respected practitioners. Where mentors are not available, materials like this and an honest and tentative approach will have to suffice.

Moderators:

These are ideally impartial individuals who **enforce the structure of a meeting**. Although it is all participants responsibilities to follow the procedures established for the meeting, the moderator has this as their official job. They ensure fair speaking time, adherence to the agenda following, polite conversation, discussion staging and other meeting policies. This role of this person is to recognize and suggest when a discussion should shift to a different phase, stage or technique. Persons who take this role must have the **trust and confidence of the whole group**. This position is also known as the Chair.
NOTE: In some groups, this role may overlap with the job of a linguistic facilitator and monitor.

Technical Facilitators:

These are the impartial individuals skilled at designing, setting up, using and maintaining the instruments of communication used in a meeting. Different skills may include the set-up of projectors and PA systems, the designing of effective slide shows, design of reports, design, printing and distribution of voting ballots and other the expert use of communication tools.

Linguistic Facilitators:

These are the impartial individuals skilled at drawing out, understanding and communicating the meaning of others. The may offer services such as rephrasing, summarizing, clarifying, relating and combining of different messages presented by participants. These people make issues, concerns, proposals and other elements **explicit**, i.e. they will clarify and label an idea or collection of ideas.

Information Facilitators:

These are the individuals that come to the meeting with large amounts of organized documentation. Information facilitators can be called on for a reference by any participant. The information should include:

- Facts and research related to each item on the agenda
- Minutes from previous discussions on the item
- The constitution
- Precedents from related decisions
- Available resources (e.g. tools and budgets)
- Calendars
- Plans

A person presenting an item may also be an information facilitator, or a different person work in partnership with the presenter. Effective information facilitation requires a thorough knowledge of the information at hand and the items up for discussion. While any participant can submit information to the group, having at least one person institutionally as an information facilitator ensures that documented references to the constitution, precedents and related facts are always at hand for quick reference. Many different people should take this role throughout a meeting and over many meetings. This promotes the distribution of knowledge and does allow information to be monopolized by any one person.

Monitors:

These are the impartial individuals who attempt to take a step back from the meeting to recognize larger patterns, trends and issues on the meta-level of the meeting. That is to say, they are not so concerned with what is being discussed, but how it is being discussed. These people keep facilitators and moderators in

check. It is their special responsibility to recognize and address more environmental, systemic, structural, personal and emotional issues that may be effecting discussions.

Experts:
These are people with a greater then normal knowledge about a specific subject. They provide insight and information on issues within their domain. They may be internal or external to the group and may act as impartial resources or active stakeholders.

Reporters/clerks:
These are the impartial individuals who record the minutes of the meeting and maintain the group documents (such as the constitution and precedents. They should be very organized, and highly trusted. They should work transparently (i.e. all their work is publicized). This role should be rotated with care to ensure systems of organization are kept consistent.

   During meetings, the reporter should make detailed notes of all ideas raised. They should highlight main points, such as question sets, proposals, concerns, decisions, and action plans. The report should often read back her or his notes to remind the group of what has been said and where the discussion is going.

   Ideally, the reporter should work with a technical facilitator to project the minutes as they are recorded, so the group can easily read them as a reference, and confirm their accuracy.

Submitting an Issue into the Group Meeting

ISSUE

Is this relevant to the group?
Informally discuss with other members.
Compare against group CONSTITUTION,
PRECEDENTS and JURISDICTION.

NO → IGNORE

YES

- Investigate further.
- Get others' input.
- Make detailed notes.
- Organize notes.
- Write up agenda item.

AGENDA ITEM
- Topic
- Detailed Description
- Relevance to group
- Importance to Stakeholders
- Background information
- key factors (time, budget, etc.)
- required communication aids
- other notes...

submit

Issue is delegated
to appropriate
person or
committee.

office

Executive Committee

Is this an issue for the whole
group, or is there a specific **office**
that would better deal with it?

group

Add ITEM to AGENDA
- summarize and include key information
- define scope of discussion
- define aim for meeting (i.e. to what
phase of discussion)
- budget time and necessary
communication aids
- choose voting method

Review ITEM submission
- understand important details and overall issue
- judge relevance and importance to stakeholders
- hypothesize amount of time required for each phase of discussion
- judge what info is most pertinent for other members to discuss

Review, format and finalize **AGENDA**

Inform key people
responsible for
related items.

Choose moderator,
facilitators, monitor
and reporter.

Invite key
stakeholders
to meeting

Release agenda and
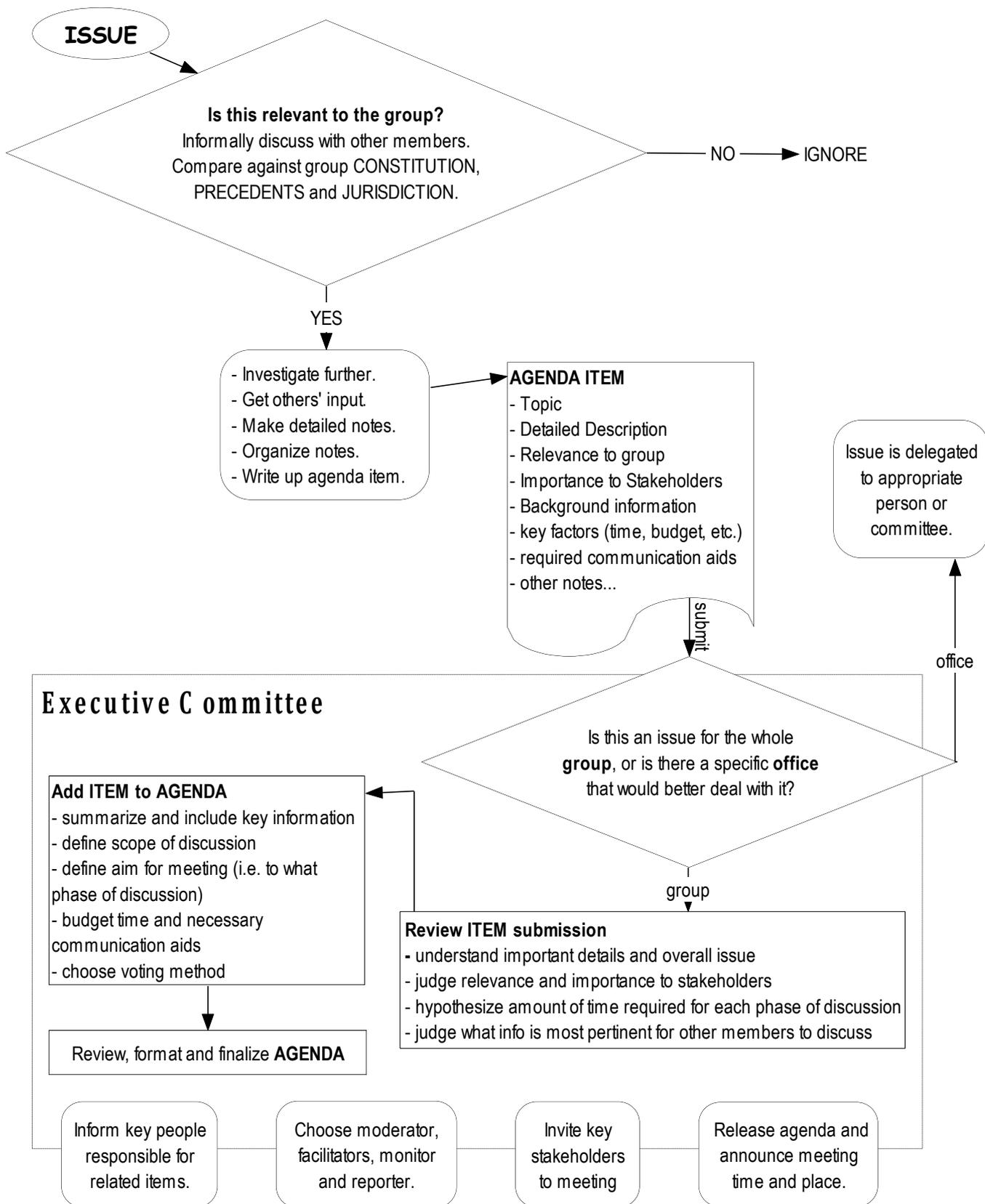announce meeting
time and place.

Figure 5 - Introducing an Issue to the Group Meeting

Step-by-Step procedures

1. Preparation:
   - Set **agenda** (see *Agenda Setting*)
     - **budget time**
     - **choose items** for discussion (refer to constitution for guidance)
     - Define **scope, aims, and priority** of discussion items
   - **Distribute agendas** a few days before meeting
   - **Announce** meeting time, place and expectations of participants to all parties.
   - Notify persons for different **required roles** (e.g. Moderator, recorder, technical facilitator, etc.) and key players to each item.
2. Social Interaction:
   - Friendly welcomes and positive mood setting
3. Facilitator communicates with group to establish how proceedings will take place
4. **Present Item** (referencing to agenda but expanding beyond it)
   - Give overview
   - Background information
   - Necessary details
   - Define goal of item (i.e. what would make the discussion successful)
   - Start direction of discussion
5. **Discussion** of item (see Discussion section)
   - **Investigation/Exploration/Understand issue** (broad discussion, research and report, brainstorm, define, contextualized, frame, scope, prioritize, etc.)
   - **Define issue as a set of fundamental criteria** that must be met
   - **Raise proposals** that meet **criteria**
   - Reformulate proposals towards a group consensus (**address all concerns**)
     - Best match all interests (esp. constitutional)
     - Within budget resources
   - Find **consensus or a form of majority rule** on a final proposal (depending on urgency)
6. **Decision possibilities:**
   - **Agreement** (progress to plan of action)
   - **Defer** to others (e.g. expert, committee, independent party)
   - **Distinct Disagreement** (move to conflict solving techniques)
   - **Postpone** (agree to discuss in the future, e.g. pending further information)
   - **Shelve** (agree to end discussion without resolution)
7. Plan of **action and responsibilities delegated** to a **working group**
8. **Confirm understanding** of discussion outcome; decide on **level of precedent** to be set by decision and **document conclusions (including plans for action).**
9. **Move on** to announce next item or **Completion**
10. **Completion**: Announce and document all **final decisions**, any **outstanding items**, and what should be **considered before next meeting.**
11. **Announce next meeting time and location**, (or where members can get this information later).
12. **Evaluation of the meeting (**e.g. What went well and what could be improved for future meetings?)
13. Social interaction and depart
END

Potential Meeting Guidelines

Following are some suggested guidelines or rules a democratic group may wish to a abide by in their decision-making process. These guidelines should be tailored to the groups specific needs and must be understood and agreed to be all participants in order to be effective.

- The group meeting is the only place for group decisions to be made, unless otherwise delegated by the group meeting.
- Never make a decision that directly effects someone without them participating in key stages of discussion (e.g. understanding of issue, proposal design, and conclusion)
- All minutes should be made publicly available within at least a few days after the meeting.
- Aggressive and violent language and behavior is not tolerated in meetings
- Any person found to be lying to or withholding important truths from the group should make a public apology and dealt with according to a strict group policy (e.g. temporary denial of member privileges)
- All decisions made by the group should fall within the goals and ideals established in the official constitution.
- Meeting agenda's should be made public and open to item submission at least [3-5?] days before the meeting.
- Where direct representation of stakeholders is not possible, others trusted individuals should be nominated to represent this stakeholders interests (e.g. inviting people from the future is impossible, but someone may represent these people for a decision that will have large effects on posterity).
- The entire group must consent to all documents that define the group and its procedures. This includes these rules, communication procedures, and the group constitution.
- No personal attacks on individuals or cultures.
- No discrimination on natural grounds (e.g. sex, age, ethnicity, disability, etc.)
- If a decision is not reached on an item, the current policy or tradition shall remain in practice, i.e. status quo remains until a group decision is made.
- Only institutional roles may interrupt a speaker, and only for the purpose of their role, i.e. to assist the group, not add their opinion. Preferably, all persons should wait for their turn to speak.

Agenda Setting (Guidance for the Executive Committee):

The agenda creates a common understanding of all the **plans and expectations of a meeting**. It functions as an **information source** for preparing members for a meeting and an **organizational tool** for planning and giving **structure** to the meeting. If designed well, publicly understood and accurately followed, the agenda can be a very powerful tool for coordinating an effective meeting.

The agenda is created by a trusted **Executive Committee**. These people should be trained in agenda setting and regularly rotated through all experienced members. It is a good idea to only rotate part of the committee at a time, i.e. have rotations overlap so that the committee never changes all members at once. This promotes continuity.

The Executive Committee is responsible for maintaining continuity between meetings (i.e. discussions pick-up where they left off). This requires the reviewing of old minutes. It is also their responsibility to prioritize items and judge which items can and should be included in the agenda. It is a good idea to establish an agenda making policies that directly relate to the group constitution. This will reduce the chance of wasting time on frivolous discussions while important issues are being ignored.

The Executive Committee has a discreet power in that it can direct how items are discussed, (e.g. for how long, who is included and how a decision will be reached). To keep this power in check, the committee should be prepared to answer any questions of why the agenda was written as such. Further more, the group meeting can overturn any decision by the Executive Committee.

Overall information to include

Some overall information that should be included within the agenda
- The **theme** or overall goal of the meeting (if there is one)
- Time **restrictions** or policy (i.e. how and when the meeting will be ended)
- Who should be in attendance (including institutional actors, stakeholders and key players)
- Each item to be discussed

Each item on the agenda should include:

- **Presenter** of item
- **Topic** of discussion stated clearly and specifically
- **Description of state** (e.g. Introduction, in progress, almost concluded)
- Suggested **scope** of discussion (i.e. what context and areas of relevance are to be included or avoided)
- **Aim** of discussion (e.g. exploration, information, decision)
- **Key factors** (e.g. time, budget)
- **Stakeholders** and **key persons** involved with the issues in discussion
- Key **background information** to understanding the issues in discussion
- Suggested discussion techniques

Structuring the Agenda

- Make sure their is adequate time for all items
- Try to arrange for the competition of older items before introducing new ones.
- Alternate intense and light discussions.
- Put a few easy decisions at the top and bottom of the meeting to improve the sense of accomplishment and cohesion in the meeting.
- Place related items together.
- Alternate presenters.
- Aim to keep meetings less then two hours, and include some form of break at least once an hour.
- Break the agenda into discrete points that can be easily scanned with the eye and followed during a meeting.

Discussion

Consensus Decision-Making

Present ITEM from AGENDA
- Topic
- Detailed Description
- Relevance to group
- Importance to Stakeholders
- Background information
- key factors (time, budget, etc.)

Some Possible Tactics
- *read from ITEM notes*
- *tell a story about issue*
- *use visuals (e.g. slides)*
- *invite a guest speaker*

Presenter Initiates Discussion

Investigation/Exploration/Understanding
- gather information
- build context
- specify key factors
- focus on areas of potential action

Some Possible Tactics
- *assign research to working group*
- *ask experts*
- *explain perspectives to each other*

VOTE: Are you confident in your grasp of the issue?

3/4 Majority "YES"

Establish a set of CRITERIA that must be met in order for the issue to be consider resolved.
- all stakeholder interests addressed
- acknowledge group limitations
- fits within Constitution
- set deadlines

? ? ?

Some Possible Tactics
- *experiment with "what if...?" statements*
- *brainstorm ideas, then reformulate and refine into core criteria*

VOTE: If these criteria are met, will you be satisfied with the group's work on this issue?

Consensus "YES"

Develop PROPOSALS for meeting CRITERIA
- introduce many diverse and creative ideas
- identify specific concerns
- reformulate proposals to address concerns
- focus and refine most popular proposal
- include any concerns that stand-aside, level of precedent to be set and basic plans of action

Some Possible Tactics
- *brainstorm ideas, then reformulate*
- *survey to recognize popular proposals*
- *assign working group to refine proposals*

VOTE: Does this proposal meet all established criteria & have all the concerns been addressed?

Consensus or Majority "YES" (depending on urgency)

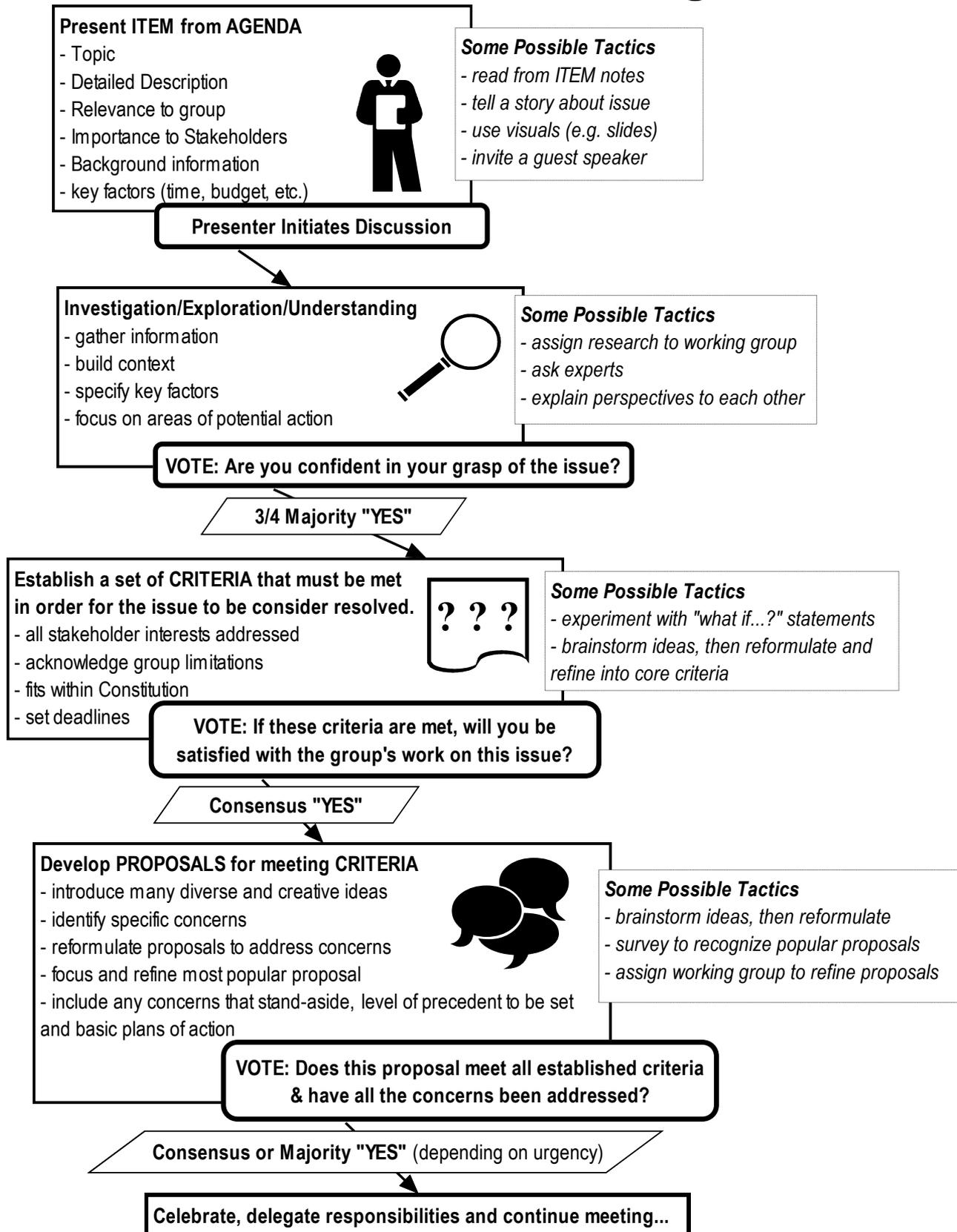**Celebrate, delegate responsibilities and continue meeting...**

Figure 6 -Basic Consensus Decision-Making Chart

Phases of discussion

Introduction of an item

- What is the topic of the item?
- Is this a new item of the continuation of an old one? If old, remind the group of previous discussions.
- Why is this item important?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- Who are the key players
- What are main factors to be dealt with?
- What is the background information? Important facts? Related research?
- Is their any relevance precedent that should be cited?

Investigation/Exploration/Understanding

- Learn more about the issue
- Discuss the issue from multiple perspectives
- Define stakeholders and key players
- Understand the underlying causes and factors
- Discover the real nature of the issue
- Look for patterns and relationships.
- Get everyone's input.
- Define the most important information to be considered.
- Beware not to drown the discussion in too much related information.
- Look to previous experiences in similar areas for insight.
- Continue to reformulate the issue until there seems to be a common and clear direction for approaching the problem

Define a set of criteria that must be met

- Specify what points must be met in order for the issue to be properly addressed.
- The criteria should included details about all the interests and needs that must be met, the goals reached, deadlines followed, resource limitations and fundamental challenges that must be overcome.
- Try to avoid including any assumptions about what the solutions will be within the criteria. This leaves the most amount of room for creative problem solving.
- Address the root causes of problems, not the symptoms.
- Be practical and realistic in what can be achieved by the group.
- Beware potential side effects of achieving certain criteria. Include secondary criteria to address these potential side effects.

Raise proposals and reformulate to address Concerns

- Different kinds of Proposals
  - A one time decision
  - Create a group policy
  - Amend constitution
  - Delegate to an external party
  - Hybrid combination
  - Decide to maintain the status-quo
- Reporter should record and read back each concern.
- Set aside areas of clear agreement and focus on solving points of difference and areas of concern.
- Ask for expert input and extend special request for concerns from stakeholders.

- If there seems to be **more the one satisfactory proposals** developing, explore them all to recognize benefits and weakness of each. The group may choose to **experiment** with a collection of them, **create a hybrid** proposal, or take a **vote** to recognize the most popular choice.

All Concerns Addressed - Consensus on a proposal

- Once all concerns have been addressed and the group seems to be forming a consensus on a proposal, the moderator may suggest a vote.
- If there are members not in attendance that have expressed interest in taking part in the item decision, the vote should be considered "in progress" until they have had a chance to read the minutes and register their with Executive Committee. A deadline should be announced for when all votes must be registered, and the voting method should be explained.
- If the proposal is accepted there should be a brief celebration (e.g. applause).
- If the proposal is not accepted, identify why and continue to discuss and reformulate.

Discussion Techniques

These suggested techniques can be applied, mixed, modified and combined as a group sees fit.

Round-robin

This is a process of giving each person in the meeting a brief opportunity to give their views on a the subject at hand. Participants can choose to pass or take their turn later. Generally conducted by the moderator who directs the turn taking around the room. This is a good way of involving quieter participants.

Brainstorm

The collaborative creation and recording of idea without analysis or judement. The aim is a high quantity of diverse ideas relating to the same issue. A group tactic usually used at the beginning a decision-making process or what there seems to be a creative block.

Anonymous notes

This is submission of unsigned written comments into a hat that is mixed up and then read back to the group. This allows people to present ideas they fear might be unpopular with some members of the group. It is especially useful when issues are sensitive.

Collaborative writing (AKA Single text)

All stakeholders take part in writing a common document that explains the issues, interests, proposals, concerns, reasoning and conclusion.

Breaking-up in Parallel

Forming smaller sub-groups from the big group to discuss specific aspects of an item. This can speed up discussion and provide increased opportunity for participation. It is also a more intimate format useful for sensitive topics.

Breaking-up in Series

A complex issue often takes time to understand and formulate a plan of action. Discussions of complex issues can be broken up into stages that are accomplished over time, giving more opportunity for reflection and needed research.

Silence

Opportunity for reflection and reading of documentation.

Survey

A survey is a form vote that is non-binding. It allows the group to recognize the depth and pervasiveness of views. This is often a good way of seeing how close the group is to consensus. Surveying can be done systematically using written questions or more organically with simple hand expressions during discussion (e.g. nod to approve, wiggle fingers to strongly approve, shake head to disapprove, swipe hands to strongly disapprove).

Surveys should include methods for registering how confident each participant is with their choice. This is useful for recognizing how deep or shallow opinions are and thus how open the group is to continued reformulation.

Fishbowl

A subgroup of active participants that represent different views discuss a topic in front of the whole group. After a set period of time, the group reconvenes and discusses the discussion. This is a good way of allowing some people to speak more while others can critically examine and consider what is said.

Decision-Making Suggestions

- If a decision to be made is very subjective (e.g. picking the colour for painting a wall):
    - o Defer to a person or group with trusted tastes
    - o Do a set of binding multiple-choice votes
    - o Randomly choose one of the more popular options (e.g. draw from a hat)
- If the group is divided between multiple options, agree to experiment with each option for a set period of time. (assuming this is possible). After all options have been tested, discuss the results and hopefully a final proposal can be formulated.
- When in doubt, trust those with the most insight into the issue and those whom have proven to be wise decision makers.
- Be realistic about how the group works and make decisions that compliment the group's tendencies.

Voting Techniques

Voting is the **group decision-making mechanism** where all participants have equal power in the decision. Voting is a formal method for members to express their preferences and opinions on a subject. It is form of binding survey that is usually conducted by the moderator but may be suggested by anyone. Voting should be used anytime the group's collective opinion must be recognized and when explicit agreement is necessary for group progress.

Each voting technique has a different effect on how the discussion will take place and what kind of result will be concluded. For this reason, group members should always be critical and tentative when choosing a voting process.

Generally, consensus takes the most amount of effort and time but results in the most widely accepted and enthusiastically supported decision. The more important the item is, the larger a majority it should require. If there are multiple options that could satisfy the item, a multiple-choice ordinal or cardinal method is recommended.

- Binary choice ½, 2/3, ¾, 4/5 majority rule
- Multiple-choice: choose just one option.
- Multiple-choice - Ordinal: rank options "first, second, third... etc."
- Multiple-choice - Cardinal: rate each option on a scale of 1-5, 1-10 etc.
- Consensus (i.e. even one person can block a decision)

Depending on the complexity and importance of the issue being voted, different methods can be used to register votes. For minor or simple votes (e.g. agreeing to postpone a discussion) a simple raising of hands or call for all those in agreement to say "ay" may suffice. For multiple choice votes or complex proposals, it is safer to use a printed survey that allows people to read and reflect on the options.

Participants may choose to abstain from a vote. Consensus within those who do vote is still considered consensus. That said, the more people who abstain, the less opinions are expressed, and thus the more

potential for a poor quality decision. If many people abstain, it probably means the question being voted on should be discussed further. Any vote that does pass with many abstainers should set only a low precedent, if any at all.

Blocking Consensus

Blocking is a very contentious issue for groups who are used majority rule. Blocking empowers even the smallest minority with the ability to stop decision-making by claiming an important concern has not bee addressed. To ensure that this power is not abused, the group meeting can use several policies:

*   Any concern that blocks consensus must:
    o   Be clearly explained (preferably written)
    o   Fit within the constitution
    o   Make rational sense to the majority of the participants
*   Politely ask proponents of the concern if they would be willing to stand aside if their concern is documented and the decision does not set a strong precedence.

If blocking is overcome, make sure to later review the results of the decision to see what validity the concern had, and thus determine what kid of precedent should be set.

Delegating Responsibilities

A basic plan for how the proposal will be enacted should be a part of the voted on proposal. Once it is accepted, responsibilities for bringing the plan to life must be delegated an individual or working group. Depending on the structure of the group and the type of actions that are necessary, different forms of delegation are possible:

*   Request volunteers
*   Ask people with appropriate skills, talents, experience and expertise
*   Assign tasks to already formed working groups

Make sure to only assign responsibilities to those who have the time and capacity to do the job professionally.

Those given responsibility should also be given an **office or scope of authority** that allows them to make **autonomous decisions within defined parameters** (i.e. set a limited jurisdiction). It should be clear what kind of decisions they can make on their own, when and whom they need to confer with, and when a decision should be addressed to the group meeting, (e.g. How much can the group spend on its work before it needs to ask the group for permission?)

The plan should include:

*   Time lines
*   Necessary resources and how they will be attained
*   Who is responsible for what and what is their jurisdiction.
*   How the group will be notified of work progress

Guidance for Institutional Roles

- Remain non-partisan, neutral and fair. If you find you have a strong opinion on a subject that you feel the need to act on, you should request for someone less partisan to take your role, and thus allow you to participate as a normal member.
- Keep the discussion on topic.
- Keep the discussion moving at a pace that is constructive, comfortable and not rushed. Provide a few seconds of silence in between speakers to improve reflection
- Always ask for group feedback on your statements and actions to confirm your interpretations are accurate and that you do not over step or offend anyone.
- Personal issues should be addressed on a personal level where those involved feel comfortable to open up.

Guidance for Monitors

- Is everyone being included?
- "How do you feel about this matter?"
- "Does anyone have strong feelings about this?"
- Is there a polarization of opinions forming?
- Are people judging the ideas or the people saying them?
- Are people remaining friendly and neighborly? If not, maybe it would be to take a break and focus on something that is of common agreement.
- Are individuals using the group as a sounding board or just desiring attention? If so, maybe they could be given an opportunity to be talk or get attention outside the formal meeting.
- Is someone with a good argument not getting the consideration they disserve? Let the group know and ask others to help advocate the argument.
- Are people taking disagreements to personally?   Emphasize group ownership of problems and ideas, not personal.
- What are the perceived pressures on the group? Time? Budget? Outside influences? Are these pressures legitimate and can they may lessened?
- Talk to senior members to understand trends and patterns that may reoccur in the group.
- Keep aware of time restraints and confer with moderator about the need for more time.
- Is conflict or tension the result of underlying emotional issues that should be addressed on a personal level?
- Do not people use manipulative communication techniques?
- Are stereotypes effecting discussions?
- Are differences of class, culture, gender, etc effecting the group?

Guidance for Technical Facilitators

- Arrive well before the meeting time to set-up and test all the equipment
- Show many people how to use the technology.
- Deal with minor problems before they grow.
- Label things so that anyone can understand how to connect and use them.
- Regularly test equipment. Don't wait for a complaint to check the technology.
- Build systems to be robust, not fragile.
- Have a simple procedure to be contacted (e.g. a well known number, pigeon hole or email).
- Design and make available a simple request form for assistance.
- Confirm presentation requirements with presenters.
- Work to make your job obsolete.

Guidance for Linguistic Facilitators

- Watch people's body language to see if they understand each other.
- Paraphrase long and/or fragmented speeches to make the main ideas clear.
- Ask people to define terms that people may have different assumptions about.
- Try to describe differences of viewpoint by their philosophical perspective, rather then ownership by an individual. This makes it easier for people to identify or distance themselves with the point of view
- Identify themes and thread of discussion.
- Summarize drawn out ideas.
- Recognize and clarify misunderstandings.
- Identify new topics as they arise.
- Remind the group meeting to focus on the ideas, not the people proposing them.
- Assist those members who cannot attend meetings, those who are shy, or those whom are not effective communicators. You may ask them to write messages they have for the group, or offer other forms of communication help.

Guidance for Information Facilitators

- Use binders or folders to organize the documents you will be administrating
- Use clear labels to title and categorize documents
- Page numbers and indexes are most helpful for large document collections (as precedents may become)
- Double check to make sure you have all the necessary documents well before the group meeting.
- Continuously review documents related to current discussion to see if their are any pertinent notes that could help inform the discussion.

Guidance for Reporters

- Highlight points of agreement, concern, proposals, key questions, decisions and other major points brought up in discussion
- Use a form of short hand or word processor
- If the discussion is moving to fast, ask the facilitator to give you some time to catch up.
- Ask people to repeat something that might have been important but you did not hear clearly.
- Focus only on making accurate notes.

Guidance for Moderators

- Keep a speakers list (using raised hands). This is known as "stacking". When there is a stack, allow others to briefly respond (if necessary) before moving to the next speaker.
- Do not let people interrupt or talk over each other, except for for "points of information". They can signify this by making a "T "with their hands.
- When things get heated, ask for a brief moment of silence.
- When things get confused. Stop and ask a facilitator and/or reporter to explain situation.
- Is the discussion shifting topic before resolving the current topic? Make sure topic shifts are explicit.
- Ensure are participants who wish to speak get a fair opportunity. Ask for the opinions of quieter members.
- Ask people to make their points as clear as possible.
- Are all key players for an item present at the meeting? If not, should the item be postponed?
- Follow the agenda as closely as possible. You do not have the right to deviate from the agenda without expressed permission from the group meeting.
- Have a watch and keep the group aware of time pressures.
- Be firm but polite and courteous. Be sensitive to different members personality types.
- If participants are repeating the same point, ask "does anyone have a different perspective on this matter?"

- If a discussion looks like it is going to take longer then the assigned time allotted, discuss this briefly with the group. Some potential options the group could vote on include:
    - Postpone the rest of the discussion for another meeting,
    - Continue and hope other items take less time
    - Continue but postpone other discussions.
    - Continue and extend meeting.

Instigating Discussion

- Does anyone have any insight into this issue?
- What are your initial ideas?

Getting to the core of the discussion

- "What causes this?"
- "What are factors at work here?"
- "Where is this coming from?"
- "What are the underlying reasons for this?"

Assisting Reformulation

- "Can these ideas be combined or run in parallel?"
- "What are the other alternatives?"
- "Is there a simpler/cheaper/quicker way of doing this?"
- "How can we ensure a quality result?"
- What are the other options?"

Recognizing Phases of Discussion

- Is the discussion dependent on a missing piece of information? Would it be better to postpone the discussion and move on to other business?
- It may a good time to move to the next phase of discussion if...
    - people are starting to assume consensus on a set of questions or a proposal.
    - no new ideas are being raised

Dealing with Concerns

- "Can anyone propose a way of proceeding that meets all the interests we have heard expressed thus far?"
- "What improvement or modification can you suggest to the current proposal that will make it more acceptable to you, while continuing to meet the interests of other stakeholders?"
- "Would the formation of **committee** to deal with this issue be helpful?"
    - Who will serve in this committee?
    - What is their specific mandate?
    - What is their timeline?
- "Would **external** advice help?"
- "Is their some **specific information** that if known could resolve this issue?"
- "Would **expert** advice help?"
- "Does this concern fall within our **constitution**?"
- "Would the concerned party be willing to **stand-by** but have their concerns recorded with the decision?"
- "Can we clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement?"
- "Is it possible to rework the proposal so that it does not include the contentious issue?"

Calling for Consensus

- "Is there anyone who can't live with the last version of what has been proposed?"
- "Have all concerns been addressed?"
- "Can anyone offer further improvements to this proposal?"

Dealing with Conflict (including blocking)

- Clarify concerns (preferably written with defined terms)
- Attend the root of problems, not the symptoms caused by them.
- Recognize all areas of agreement, (review the constitution).
- Ask opposing factions to explain other's argument.
- Invite an experienced mediator to deal help resolve the conflict.
- Form a committee to address the conflict outside of the group meeting. Include members representing the differing views, along with a few neutral parties.
- Form an independent jury to hear all sides and make a final judgment.
- Is there missing information that might help resolve the conflict?
- Would a personal one-on-one discussion with a monitor or other respected group member help improve the situation?
- Can the group afford to delay a decision? If so, maybe some time for reflection would be helpful. If not, a majority rule vote may be necessary.
- Would a new amendment to the constitution help?
- If everyone agrees with the constitution, no one should be pressured to leave the group.
- If the status quo cannot be maintained: "Can anyone think of an interim solution that uses what agreement there is?"

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Field interviews and observations from assorted ecovillages March 21 – April 11 2002:
- Argayall spiritual eco-resort – Gomera/Canaries, Spain.
- Andelssamfundet i Hjortshøj – Denmark
- Ibsgaarden, Roskilde – Denmark
- Kaephøj, Roskilde – Denmark
- Munksøgård, Roskilde – Denmark

Appendix A

Select quotes from:
THE SOCIAL CONTRACT OR PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL RIGHT
By: Jean Jacques Rousseau. 1762.

These quotes relate directly to the ideas an assembly (read "meaning") for decision-making and a social contract (read "constitution") for defining the group.

- " *"The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before."* This is the fundamental problem of which the *Social Contract* provides the solution. " - book 1 ch 6
- *"Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole."* *Book 1 ch 6*
- "As soon as this multitude is so united in one body, it is impossible to offend against one of the members without attacking the body, and still more to offend against the body without the members resenting it." *Book 1 ch 7*
- "...obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty." Book 1 ch 8
- "...instead of destroying natural inequality, the fundamental compact substitutes, for such physical inequality as nature may have set up between men, an equality that is moral and legitimate, and that men, who may be unequal in strength or intelligence, become every one equal by convention and legal right." Book 1 ch 9
- "Our will is always for our own good, but we do not always see what that is; the people is never corrupted, but it is often deceived, and on such occasions only does it seem to will what is bad." Book 2 ch 3
- What people put into government needs to come back to them or they will tire and become "exhausted by giving continually" book 3 ch 8
- "... the Sovereign cannot act save when the people is assembled." Book 3 ch 12 [i.e. the will of the people can only be recognized in the process of a meeting]
- From book 3 ch 13: assemble regularly and when necessary; assembly is only legitimate when approved of by law; strong government meets more often;
- "Good laws lead to the making of better ones; bad ones bring about worse. As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State *What does it matter to me?* the State may be given up for lost." Book 3 ch 15
- "As long as several men in assembly regard themselves as a single body, they have only a single will which is concerned with their common preservation and general well-being." Book 4 ch 1
- "**The more concert reigns in the assemblies, that is, the nearer opinion approaches unanimity, the greater is the dominance of the general will**." Book 4 ch 2
- Concerning what fraction of a majority should be necessary for a decision: "First, the more grave and important the questions discussed, the nearer should the opinion that is to prevail approach unanimity. Secondly, the more the matter in hand calls for speed, the smaller the prescribed difference in the numbers of votes may be allowed to become..." book 4 ch 2
- "The inflexibility of the laws, which prevents them from adapting themselves to circumstances, may, in certain cases, render them disastrous, and make them bring about, at a time of crisis, the ruin of the State." Book 4 ch 6

Appendix B

Sceneries
Coming soon...

Potential Graphics / Charts
- Hand signs
- Binder of Precedents
- Constitution
- Book of minutes

Potential Forms
- Agenda Item
- Agenda
- Plan of action
- Question sets
- Elements of proposal

Misc notes:
- understanding before judgment
- transparency of all d-m outside main meeting = published minutes & reasoning
- generally: directly address group & process issues in appropriate meetings
- tentative process
- Edward de Bono
- negotiation aims for a deal, consensus aims for agreement
- rowers in a boat metaphor
- personal attitudes, cultural expectations, social relations, communication systems, d/m procedures
- people need time to read, reflect, research & deliberate. = work less