

Annex 12

The Stages of the Consensus Process

TOOLS FOR CHAPTER 4 OF THE GUIDE: STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

A multitude of models for achieving consensus exist. Some groups develop very detailed procedures, while others follow a more organic process. The following process outlines the stages that are common to most models. While it is not always necessary to go through a formal process for each and every decision the coalition makes, it is a good idea to regularly practice applying a model. A group's familiarity with the process can really help when it comes to making difficult or complex decisions.

This model will work well in groups of about 15 to 20 people. Larger groups may need to build in extra steps in order to ensure that everyone is able to participate fully.

Consensus Flowchart*

Step 1: Introduce and clarify the issue(s) to be decided

Share relevant information. Work out what the key questions are.

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas

1. Gather initial thoughts and reactions. What are the **issues** and **concerns**?
2. Collect **ideas** for resolving the concerns and write them down.
3. Have a **broad-ranging discussion** and debate the ideas:
 - a) List the pros and cons;
 - b) Think about solutions to the concerns; and
 - c) Eliminate some ideas, shortlist others.

Step 3: Look for emerging proposals

Is there one idea, or a series of ideas, that combine the best qualities of the ideas discussed? Develop a solution that everyone might agree on and create a proposal.

* Developed by Seeds for Change. For a more detailed description of the consensus process and other tools for facilitating consensus in a group, see: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/>.

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend the proposal

Ensure that any remaining concerns are heard and that everyone has a chance to contribute.

Look for **amendments** that make the proposal even more acceptable to the group.

Step 5: Test for agreement

Have coalition members reached an agreement? Check for the following:

- **Blocks:** A fundamental disagreement with the proposal that cannot be resolved. Participants who block the proposal will want to develop a new one;
- **Stand asides:** When participants do not support the proposal but decide to let it pass without them;
- **Reservations:** When participants voice some reservations but are willing to support the proposal's adoption;
- **Agreement:** When participants support the proposal and are willing to help implement it; and
- **Consensus:** No blocks, not too many stand asides or reservations? Active agreement? Then the group has reached a decision!

Step 6: Implement the decision

Establish the who, when and how. Define the various tasks, assign responsibilities and set deadlines, etc.