

## #5 Establish Decision Making Procedures

### ***What are decision making procedures?***

Decision making is one of the most important activities of a site council. Clarifying both which decisions belong to a council and the process to arrive at these decisions is an important first activity of a council. Many site councils use consensus decision making. Others use consensus and have a fall back voting decision making method if the council is unable to reach consensus.

Ideally, the team should:

- Discuss how decisions will be made, such as when to take a poll, when to decide by consensus (are there times when a decision by only a few people is acceptable?).
- Explore more important issues by polling (each member is asked to vote or state an opinion verbally or in writing).
- Decide important issues by consensus.
- Test for consensus (“This seems to be our agreement. Is there anyone who feels unsure about this choice?”).
- Use data as the basis of decisions.

### **Reaching Consensus**

Consensus is *a general agreement among several people*. It occurs when all group members can support a decision.

Consensus is not:

- a unanimous vote—a consensus may not represent everyone’s first priorities.
- a majority vote—in a majority vote, only the majority gets something they are happy with; people in the minority may get something they don’t want at all, which is not what consensus is about.
- everyone totally satisfied.

### ***Why is it important?***

Defining the decisions a council will make as well as the process for making them will focus council meetings and prevent unnecessary conflict.

## ***When do you need them?***

Establishing decision making procedures is one of the first things a council should do. Periodic re-evaluation is useful for a council when new members join, at the beginning of the school year, at mid-year or end-of-year for a self-assessment, or when group process appears to be breaking down.

Remember, it is very important to determine a decision making process prior to making actual decisions.

## ***How do you develop them?***

To determine if all group members have reached the mutual acceptance of a decision, the leader or facilitator (or any team member) should ask:

1. *Does everyone accept the decision?* A “yes” answer means that a decision has been made.
2. *Is there any opposition to this decision?* If no one speaks, the answer may be that everyone agrees with the decision; the questioner should also be alert for non-verbal signs which could indicate opposition.
3. *Can everyone live with the decision?* A “yes” ensures that people can support the decision.

The challenge of consensus is leading the discussion so that each group member can make the following statements:

1. I’ve heard your position.
2. I believe you’ve heard my position.
3. I’ve asked for help or accommodation.
4. I can support the proposed decision.

**How do we decide??**