



Consensus - a key process

There likely will be differences within the committee about any topic. However, majority consensus can be reached through discussion, paying attention to feedback, action plans and respect for diverse experiences and ideas.

Consensus is the preferred method for reaching agreement – about a decision, a recommendation, etc. It is an agreement that everyone on the committee can support, at least at the moment. It's what everyone can live with, even if it isn't their desired solution. Getting consensus will be easy on some things and very difficult on others.

Here are some guidelines that will help. Also see *Ground rules for committee activities* (CP.8) and *Ground rules for healthy conflict* (CP.9).

But how do you reach this agreement?

1. Start the process with a proposal (tentative decision or recommendation).
2. Clarify the proposal.
3. Check for immediate consensus. Adopt the proposal if it is immediately acceptable to all committee members. If not ...
4. List concerns. Group them, if appropriate.
5. Resolve concerns. Go through each individual or group of concerns, one at a time. Try to reduce the number.
6. If concerns remain unresolved:
 - seek a "third party" solution (modify proposal, if appropriate)
 - re-visit committee purpose and values
 - examine individual motives
 - conduct a "go-round"
 - request a "stand-aside"
7. Continue until consensus is reached.
8. If consensus is not possible:
 - refer to a third party
 - apply legitimate authority (co-chairs)

For more, see resources such as:

"Skills, strategies and tools, Some specific activities" (Kit 3) in *The Kit: A guide to the advocacy we choose to do. A resource kit for consumers of mental health services and family carers*. Prepared by SPICE Consulting for the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. Available on the web at: <http://www.mhca.org.au/Resources/CommunityDevelopment/index.html#TheKit>.

