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Facilitation Guide

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Handling Disagreements and Conflict

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This guide is part of a community organizing resource series:

- Organizing Basics
- Facilitation
- Convening Meetings / Teams
- How to Start a Successful Group
- Security Culture
- Mediation / Supported Conversations

Check them out at: neighborhoodanarchists.org/organizing

- Time is the facilitators ally. If you feel that a conversation or decision is not going to be resolved you can suggest to defer the conversation or decision to a later time. This will give the team members a chance to cool off and think about the topic in more depth.
- Finally you can suggest participants utilize the group's conflict resolution process.

Conclusion

This is a lot of information but it all comes easier with practice. Remember that the group wants you to succeed. Don't be afraid to get out there and try facilitating!

Any questions? Additional ideas to include in this guide? Things that could be simpler? Other feedback? Please send them to guides@neighborhoodanarchists.org

other before jumping to conclusions or judgment.

- Clarifying or summarizing people's positions so that it is not misinterpreted by another member can be helpful (especially in tense or tough discussions).

Once a disagreement has arisen:

- Use your judgment to determine the level of intervention (if any). Intervention should vary depending on the severity and atmosphere of the conflict as well as the overall group norms for conflict resolution.
- Remind the group that disagreement is natural and that this is all part of the process. You all want the group to be successful and you will eventually reach a decision that everyone is happy with.
- Mention areas of common ground and clearly state where the areas of disagreement are so participants are clear about what is being discussed.
- If disagreement seems to be based on personal preferences, try inviting people to look to the group mission or principles to see what to align to.
- Try to find the fear(s) or worry underneath the disagreement and address that.
- If things continue to escalate, simply naming that conflict or tension has arisen can do a lot to de-escalate things. Offer to take a short break.
- If it gets personal insist on at least a short break.

We've all been in meetings where people are talking over each other, discussion jumps from topic to topic and back without resolution, everyone is confused, tensions are high, nothing is decided, you end way over time, and everyone leaves frustrated. But meetings don't have to be this way. Effective facilitation can make meetings more pleasant, organized, clear, supportive, inclusive, and egalitarian. This guide is meant to help more people feel empowered to facilitate so that roles can be more equally distributed and meetings can run smoothly in every organization.

A facilitator's overall role is to ensure that everyone is heard and that good process is used to reach common goals.

Facilitation Principles

Here are a few core facilitation principles. Someone who mastered just these would be an excellent facilitator. The rest of this guide provides examples and specifics.

- **Clarity** - Make everything as clear and as simple as possible so it's easier for people to participate.
- **Focus on the group** - Pay attention to the group. What does the group need?
- **Steward the process** - You focus on the process so others can focus on the content.

Roles of a Facilitator

A facilitator wears many hats as a result of being a steward of the process.

- **Keep the meeting on track** - Keeps discussion to one topic at a time and finish each topic before moving on to the next one.
- **Stack** - Tracks who wants to talk and whose turn it is to talk. (More below)
- **The big picture** - Makes the purposes of the meeting and topics clear to all.
- **Watch vibes** - Maintains awareness of participants' levels of emotional, mental, and physical needs throughout the meeting/conversation.
- **Keep Time** - Keeps track of time and what's left on the agenda. Reminds people of the time so they can decide what's important to prioritize.
- **Decisions** – Test for consensus and temperature checks for decisions as needed. Follows the decision making / consensus process the group has agreed to. (More below.)
- **Conflict Resolution** - Evaluates how to handle conflict if it arises. (More below)

- **Down twinkles** - Indicate disagreement with what is being said. One may be asked to clarify one's objection.
- **Hard block** - Indicates a firm opposition to the proposal. This signifies the that the approval of the proposal goes against the interests or principles of the group.
- **Time** - This reminds group to be aware of the time.
- **Re-centering Llama** - Shows that the discussions has strayed from the topic and gently refocuses the group.
- **Vibes Watch** - Signals that things are getting tense. Address the tension and/or take a break.

Handling Disagreements and Conflict

Conflict is natural in any group. A facilitator can help conflict be healthy and lead to stronger connections and decisions.

Preventing conflict:

Many conflicts can be avoided by proper facilitation of tough discussions.

- Encouraging a healthy culture where participants are actively listening in an attempt to understand each



- To get on **Stack** raise one hand and look to the stacker (facilitator) to confirm your addition to stack. You will be called in the order you were added.
- **Clarifying question** - This shows one has a question necessary to clarify what was just said. (*Jumps stack*)
- **Direct response** - This shows you have something that must be said after the person speaking, usually for clarity's sake. (*Jumps stack*)
- **Point of process** - This sign shows one has an idea for how to improve meeting process. (*Jumps stack*)
- **Up twinkles** - Indicates agreement, with what is being said or with a consensus proposal.
- **Flat hands** - Means that you are unsure. One may be asked to clarify one's position.

Facilitation Tips

There are a lot of tips here, but remember the key is to focus on the group. *What does the group need?* These are just some ways to respond to what the group needs.

- **Explain everything** - You're the narrator of the meeting. What can be obvious to you can be confusing to someone else so explain what's happening in the meeting (especially if there are new people present). This includes explaining what you're doing as a facilitator.
- **Pay attention** - People are relying on you to support them (to speak, to address a problem, etc). Look for hand signals, people with confused expressions, people who clearly want to say something but aren't, etc. If you're distracted, everyone is distracted. Listen.
- **Read the room** - What are the group dynamics? What does the group need? Do they need something explained/clarified? Do they need a break? Do they need a clearer proposal or simpler question? Do they need to focus? Is there tension that needs to be addressed? Do they need to move faster/slower? Do they need to explore this fun tangent for a moment?
- **Summarize** - Listen to what people are saying. When there is a lull or confusion step in to summarize what you've heard. This can clarify where people agree and disagree and make the rest of the discussion easier.

- **Ask permission** - Everything you do is with the consent of the group. Ask permission frequently to remind everyone that they are in control. “Shall we move on to the next topic?” “How about we focus on this question first?”
- **Help each person feel heard** - Use paraphrasing, scribing (writing stuff up front where everyone can see it), summarizing, and other methods to reflect back what people are saying.
- **Be impartial** - Ideally a facilitator should be completely impartial and just serve to facilitate the group, though that is not always practical. If you must give content (opinions, solutions, answers to questions, how you feel about a proposal, input), label it as clearly separate from your facilitation role, verbally place yourself last on stack, and be brief. If you realize your feelings on an issue cloud your ability to continue facilitating, you may pass on the duties to someone else (let the group know that this is what you’re doing).
- **Always use an agenda** - If there isn’t an agenda then make a quick one. Always have an agenda so it’s clear what you’re talking about and what’s next.
- **One discussion at a time** - Keep to one topic at a time and finish it before moving on. Break up complicated discussion into multiple smaller ones if needed.
- **Frequent temperature checks** – Frequent, quick temperature checks for big and small decisions

Stack

Stack is a set of hand signals that helps keep order for when people want to speak without interrupting one another, let’s people express their thoughts or feelings without having to speak, and can also help structure and focus the conversation. The facilitator often keeps track of stack (or that can be a specific role).

Progressive stacking can be used to give marginalized groups, voices that are often submerged, discounted, or excluded, and those with lived experience a greater chance to speak by placing them before those on stack without lived experience or who have already spoken.

Some hand signals “Jump Stack” meaning they would go before someone who has already raised their hand. Don’t let people misuse these in order to just talk sooner.

Basic consensus process:

1. Someone proposes something (Or sometimes the facilitator can listen to the direction of discussion and present a proposal to help move things along.)
2. The group asks clarifying questions on the proposal
3. Discussion on the proposal using stack (see above)
4. Check for consensus
 - a. Agree - Thumbs up (or twinkle up) - Basic alignment with group direction and proposal.
 - b. Disagree - Thumb down (or twinkle down) - Disagree with the decision but are willing to let the group proceed if that's what the rest of the group wants to do.
 - c. Hard block - Holding arms up and crossed - This indicates a firm opposition to the proposal. This signifies the that the approval of the proposal goes against the interests or principles of the group.
5. If there are disagreements or blocks, invite people voice their concerns. This may spark more discussion and a new proposal (start over at step 1).
6. If disagreements can't be resolved the proposal can still proceed.
7. If blocks can't be resolved then the proposal does not proceed. People will need to rework the proposal (probably outside of the meeting) and come back, or drop the idea.

ensure that everyone is on the same page and welcomes even slight hesitations that can end up being valuable concerns.

- **Be open about your needs** - You're a person with needs too. Don't hesitate to say if you need a short break or if you need someone to take over facilitating (for whatever reason).
- **Ask for feedback** - We're always learning and growing. Asking for honest feedback at the end of the meeting is the best way to improve.

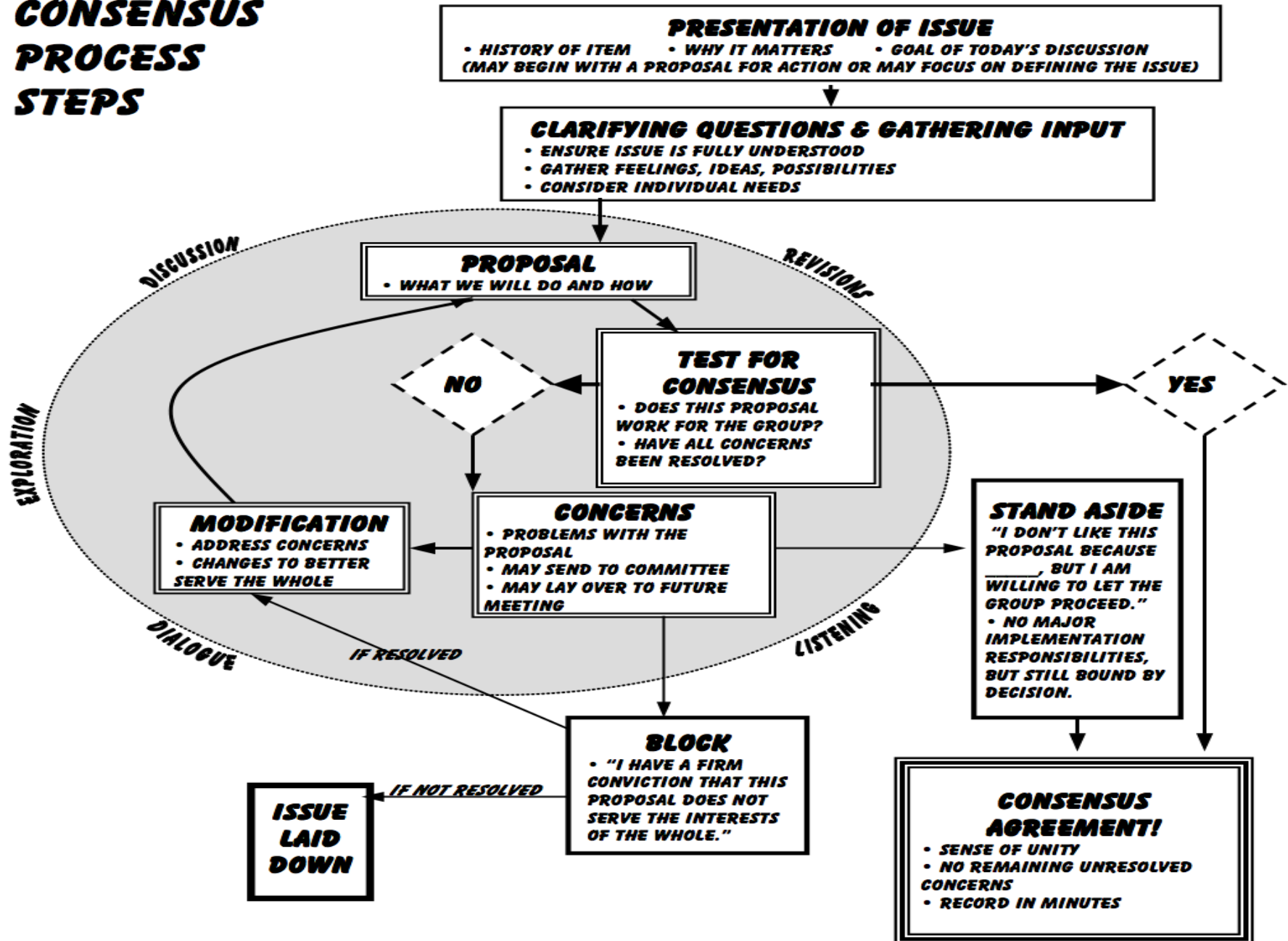
Consensus Decision Making

At its most basic, consensus is the general agreement within a group. Consensus Basics:

- Consensus comes from the idea that the power for making a decision should be in the hands of everyone involved instead of the hands of a few.
- All opinions, ideas, and concerns are taken into account.
- There is no hierarchy in consensus, it aims to be egalitarian.
- Consensus strives to come to an agreement that works for everyone and adapt to everyone's needs and concerns. This helps create better decisions for the group.

More details on consensus: consensuscheck.com/consensus

CONSENSUS PROCESS STEPS



Consensus Flowchart Graphic by Tree Bresen (treegroup.info)

Basic description of consensus process on next page