

Evaluating ideas

Consensus decision making

Voting as a method of decision making should be used with care as it creates a win/lose dynamic where the 'majority rules' – those who didn't support the decision may feel left out and lack commitment to the outcome.

Consensus decision-making can be a very useful alternative, where options are explored until one is found that either everyone supports, or for those who don't support, agree that they can live with. Consensus is more inclusive but can take more time.

Some techniques to help achieve consensus include:



Listening for agreement¹

The facilitator encourages the group to listen for agreement and does the same during a series of rounds or free flowing discussion.

Eventually, there will be moments when agreement happens – when everyone aligns on a solution. Often there will be a clear shift – people relax slightly or everyone suddenly nods and says 'that's it'. This is the time for the facilitator (or group member) to get involved – 'I think we have agreement. Let's check it out.' If agreement has been reached, record it. If not, continue the discussion.

Sometimes partial agreement can be captured. Record this, and then continue – sometimes a series of partial agreements can lead to a final group decision.

Using break-out groups

This basic technique uses small groups to maximise debate and participation, while allowing the larger group to move forward. It is suitable for groups in conflict or needing to redefine their role or direction.

Follow the steps below:

- Clarify the required decision with the group.
- Form small groups to explore options and discuss their merits.

¹ Hunter et al 1992 in 'From Seed to Success' Toolkit for Community Conservation project, Department of Conservation, prepared June 2003 by Michelle Rush and Helen Ritchie

Please note: these resources are a compilation of our individual and research. Every effort has been made to reference resources. Please notify Community Waikato should you identify any referencing omissions.

- After a set period of time, get each group to report back. Collate the options in the wider group, and then put participants back into the same small groups to try to agree on their preferred option.
- Reconvene the large group, so the facilitator can draw out areas of agreement on certain points and record them.
- If there is still no clear agreement within and between groups, get people to break into small groups again and repeat the process.
- Each time people are brought back together, the aim is to progress forward, note points of agreement, and narrow down the focus for the next small group discussion.

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