

Team Building

Tips for Successful Consensus

1. **Listen carefully.** Ask for reasons and seek out the assumptions behind statements. Be open to others' reactions to your ideas and consider them carefully.
2. **Encourage all members to participate fully.** Don't assume that silence means agreement. Periodically circle the group and have each member state his or her view.
3. **Seek out differences of opinion.** Probe for alternative viewpoints. Disagreements are natural and helpful because they increase the range of information and opinions that the group can use in its decision process.
4. **Search for alternatives that meet the goals of all members.** Don't assume someone must win and someone must lose. When there's a stalemate, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members.
5. **Avoid changing your mind ONLY to avoid conflict.**
6. **Don't just argue for your point of view.** Seek ways of combining your ideas with others' views. Try to incorporate criticism of your ideas into your proposals.
7. **Balance power.** If one or two group members have more power or authority than the others (for example, if one member supervises the group), then the member with more authority should not state his/her view until late in the discussion after all other views have been heard.
8. **Make sure there is enough time.** The "reaching consent" part of consensus takes a lot of time. Meetings should be long enough to allow for full discussion, and there should be enough meetings for a decision to emerge.
9. **Check understanding.** Check to see if everyone understands the decision and can explain why it was the best decision.