

(sample – from the Georgetown Solidarity Committee in Washington, DC)

Meetings: Consensus Process and Facilitation

Our Meetings are Safe Spaces: We actively attempt to make our meetings a space where people can feel comfortable and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender, class, racial, ethnic, age, or experience-based identities. We must strive to respect all individuals and critique ideas constructively, rather than criticizing people in harmful or hurtful ways.

Our Meetings are Democratic and Participatory: We aim to involve all members in our decision-making processes as much as possible, allowing individuals' input in the decision-making process to reflect the degree to which they are affected by the decision in question. We use a method known as consensus to achieve this. To make consensus work well, we must all constantly strive to work cooperatively and constructively to reach useful and valuable conclusions. There are several key roles in this process:

- **Individuals** must self-facilitate as much as possible during a meeting. This means constantly asking ourselves key questions like:
 - “Am I speaking more or more often than other people?”
 - Am I simply rephrasing ideas others have already suggested to legitimize them or claim them as my own?”
 - “Am I marginalizing others’ views along gender, sex, or experience lines?”
 - “Am I respecting the facilitator’s moderation and not speaking out of turn, etc.?”
- **The facilitator** will attempt to keep the conversation flowing effectively while doing three important things:
 - The facilitator will seek out equitable participation from members of diverse genders, sexual orientations, races and ethnicities, ages and levels of experience. The facilitator should both:
 - 1) Limit input from people who are overrepresented in the discussion, and
 - 2) Encourage increased participation from people who are underrepresented in the discussion. Our decisions are always stronger when they reflect the input of a wider range of perspectives.
 - The facilitator will keep a “stack” to moderate the order in which people speak, though the facilitator also has the ability to adjust the stack as necessary.
 - The facilitator will seek out consensus where it exists by reformulating proposals and calling for a show of consensus to avoid repetitive and counterproductive discussion.
- **A notes-taker and a chalkboard recorder** will keep track of what’s said in the discussion both on the board and in the meeting notes, which should be sent out by e-mail as soon as possible after the meeting. Periodically the facilitator or others might call on these records to review what’s already been covered.
- **When a call for consensus on a proposal is made**, each member has several options.
 - **Consensus** – if you agree with a proposal or have no substantial objections, give consensus.
 - **Reservations** – if you have concerns that need to be expressed but which do not need to stop the proposal from passing, i.e., you can live with it.
 - **Standing aside** – if you don’t mind others doing the proposed action but you personally can’t, express your intent to stand aside.
 - **Blocking** – this is the most serious position: in this case you feel the proposal is immoral or counter to the purpose of the group and you cannot support the group doing this.

Our Meetings end with Reflection: At this time we’ll evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting process and group dynamics. We’ll include individual “go-rounds” where we each offer a brief comment on how we’re feeling, where we’re at, etc.