Consensus decision making

Networks should make decisions in a way that builds strength and participation. Consensus decision-making is a group decision making process that seeks the agreement of all participants including staff of CCNSW.

Using consensus in a decision-making process implies that all people who attend a meeting are united in the decision that is made at the meeting, and support the implementation of that decision. Consensus decision-making is different from majority decision-making or decision-making by voting because it ensures that the outcome does not produce winners and losers.

Consensus decision making is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement between all members of a group. Instead of simply voting for an item and having the majority of the group getting their way, a group using consensus is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports, or at least can live with. This ensures that all opinions, ideas and concerns are taken into account. Through listening closely to each other, the group aims to come up with proposals that work for everyone.

Consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity – it aims to go further by weaving together everyone's best ideas and key concerns – a process that often results in surprising and creative solutions, inspiring both the individual and the group as whole.

As a decision-making process, consensus decision-making aims to be:

- **Agreement Seeking:** A consensus decision making process attempts to help everyone get what they need.

- **Collaborative:** Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible.

- **Cooperative:** Participants in an effective consensus process should strive to reach the best possible decision for the group and all of its members, rather than competing for personal preferences.

- **Egalitarian:** All members of a consensus decision-making body should be afforded, as much as possible, equal input into the process. All members have the opportunity to present, and amend proposals.

- **Inclusive:** As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.

- **Participatory:** The consensus process should actively seek the input and participation of all decision-makers.

The six stages of the consensus process

Step 1. Introduce and clarify the issue(s) to be decided

Share relevant information. Work out what the key questions are.

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas

1. Gather initial thoughts and reactions. What are the issues and concerns?
2. Collect ideas for solving the problem – write them down.
3. Have a broad ranging discussion and debate the ideas:
   - What are the pros and cons?
   - Start to think about solutions to the concerns.
   - Eliminate some ideas, short list others.

Step 3: Look for emerging proposals

Is there one idea, or a series of ideas, that brings together the best qualities of the ideas discussed?
Look for a solution that everyone might agree on and create a proposal.

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal

Ensure that any remaining concerns are heard and that everyone has a chance to speak.

Look for amendments that make the proposal even more acceptable to the group.

Step 5: Test for agreement

Do you have agreement? Check for the following:

1. **Blocks:** I have a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal that cannot be resolved. We need to look for a new idea.
2. **Stand asides:** I can't support this proposal because... but I don't want to stop the group, so I'll let the decision happen without me.
3. **Reservations:** I have some reservations but am willing to let the proposal pass.
4. **Agreement:** I support the proposal and am willing to help implement it.
5. **Consensus:** No blocks, not too many stand asides or reservations? Active agreement?

Then we have a decision!

Step 6: Implement the decision

Who, when, how? Action point the various tasks, set deadlines etc.