

## “Formal Consensus” Cheat Sheet

“Cooperative non-violent conflict resolution doesn’t exist in modern North American society and this model is profoundly significant for future of our species” (Butler, 1987)

History - written in 1987 for Pledge of Resistance group and used at meetings of over 100 people, currently in 6th edition

Definition: An effective, democratic, formal structure to empower groups in decision-making.

Characteristics:

1. Synthesis and evolution vs. competition and attrition
2. Conflict is encouraged, supported and resolved
3. Non-violent, power is not used to dominate
4. Most democratic process vs. majority rule and Robert’s rules
5. Everyone is respected and all contributions are valued

Goals:

1. Provide a foundation, structure, and techniques for efficient and productive group discussions
2. Develop decisions that are good for the whole group and in alignment with group defined goals and values
3. Provide guidelines and formats for managing meetings, facilitating discussion, resolving conflict and reaching decisions
4. Promote cooperation over competition

Cornerstones: encourage participation, equal access to power, develop cooperation, promotes empowerment, creates sense of individual responsibility for groups actions.

Principles: trust, respect, unity of purpose, non-violence, self-empowerment, cooperation, conflict resolution, commitment to the group, active participation, equal access to power, patience

Consensus Process:

- Level one - A proposal is presented and clarifying questions asked, broad, open discussion to include philosophical and political implications as well as general merits and drawbacks of the proposal as a whole. Clarifying questions are strictly limited by the facilitator to those which seek a greater comprehension of the proposal as presented. If there seems to be a general approval, a call for consensus can be made.
- Level two - all concerns are brainstormed, listed and grouped together, no attempt to defend proposal or resolve concern at this level

- Level three - if most of the concerns seem to be resolved, a call for consensus can be made; if there are remaining concerns, resolutions are explored for each remaining concern one at a time; if all concerns seem to be resolved, a call for consensus can be made; if there are remaining concerns that cannot be resolved in the allotted time, move to close
- Closing - adopted with unresolved concerns listed, blocked or as a last resort only if the decision can wait, sent to committee

#### Proposals:

- Only considered if intention is to accomplish the common purpose of the group
- All are adopted unless the group decides it is contrary to the best interest of the group
- No proposal is adopted until there is resolution of all objections/concerns - individuals can agree to disagree by acknowledging that they have unresolved concerns, but consent to the proposal anyway
- Should be submitted to the group well in advance of meeting to allow all members to read and consider the proposal before the meeting in which a decision is required

#### Objections:

- Not choice of individual alone to determine if an objection prevents proposal from being adopted
- Presented to the group and either resolved or validated
- Valid objections keep with prior group decisions and are based on commonly held principles, values and goals as defined by the group and in the best interest of the group - if an objection doesn't meet these requirements it is deemed not valid

Evaluation - every meeting using 'Formal Consensus' must have an evaluation.

Roles - agenda planner, facilitator, peacekeeper, advocate, timekeeper, public scribe, note-taker, doorkeeper; the decision of who fills each role is made by consensus without debate, any objection automatically causes a new selection to be made.

Butler, C.T. and Rothstein, Amy. "On Conflict and Consensus: a handbook on Formal Consensus decision making", Food Not Bombs Publishing, Portland, ME (1987).