

Consensus

“Consensus and You”

“Building Consensus”

“What is Consensus”

“Why Consensus Matters”

“How To: Consensus”

Consensus: A Dictionary Definition

- General agreement or accord.
- An opinion or position reached by a group as a whole.
- A generally accepted opinion or decision among a group of people.
- A process of decision-making that seeks widespread agreement among group members.

Consensus: What it is not

- Unanimity (which is ideal but rarely achievable)
- Vote (a form of structured debate, not a finality)
- The Highest Paid Person's Opinion (HIPPO)



Consensus: What it is

- An effort to incorporate all participants' legitimate concerns
- Best improved through collaboration and consensus, not through combat and capitulation.
 - Silence does not imply consent.
- Determined by the quality of arguments (not by a simple counted majority)
 - Polls should be regarded as structured discussions rather than voting.
- It is often better to accept a less-than-perfect compromise, with the understanding that the goal is gradually improving, than to try to fight to implement a particular preferred version immediately.
 - "rough consensus and running code": practical, working systems that can be quickly implemented.



Consensus is about Empathy; Understanding the Why

Consensus: Understanding Why

- Consensus decision-making emphasizes finding out why dissent occurs.
- The arguments "I just don't like it" and "I just like it" usually carry no weight whatsoever.
 - Instead, this is an opportunity to ask "Why?". Find out what they like or dislike about it, then figure out how the group can address what they dislike and ensure what they like remains part of the solution.

Consensus: The Process

1. Identify The Problem
 - Give context for what, where, and why. Avoid bias or implying the solution.
2. Propose a Solution
 - Outline one or more solutions and their pros/cons.
3. Consensus check
 - Identify concerns
 - Modify proposal
 - Repeat as necessary
4. Record the outcome

But what if we can't agree? That will be covered in a later section.

Consensus: Recognizing

One of the key aspects of the process is the “Consensus Check”, but how do we recognize if we have it? That’s the question we have to work out together. The goal of the Engineering Discussion meeting is to provide the dedicated space and time to synchronously discuss, debate, and check for consensus.

Wikipedia: “Editors usually reach consensus as a natural process. After one changes a page, others who read it can choose whether or not to further edit. When editors do not reach agreement by editing, discussion on the associated talk pages continues the process toward consensus.”

RFC: Submit proposal, discuss in a mailing list, open to a (super)majority vote, wait, repeat.

Consensus: The Process Roles

- Facilitator
- Empath ("vibe check")
- Time keeper
- Note taker

In smaller groups it may not be possible to have designated people in each role; instead each person in the group should try to fulfill each role as they see necessary or multiple roles may be handled by one person at a time.

Consensus: What if we cannot agree?

- Use independent discretion
- Allow cautious change
- Revisit later / "Sleep on it"
- Tie breaker as a last resort when there is no good solution or all options are good options.

More formally:

- Non-support: "I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along with it."
- Standing aside: "I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it."
- Major objection: "I cannot live with this proposal if it passes, and here is why?..!"
- Agree to disagree

Consensus: Objectives

- **Collaboration:** Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible.
- **Cooperation:** 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.
- **Egalitarianism:** 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.
- **Inclusion:** As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in a consensus decision-making process.
- **Participation:** The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers.

Consensus: Additional Resources

[Wikipedia:Consensus](#): How Wikipedia Works

[Consensus decision-making](#): A history and summary of various methods

[The Anarchist Library: Consensus Decision Making](#):

