

Through Discussion and Teamwork



We Put The Puzzle Together

Concept 9 states...

All elements of our service structure have the responsibility to carefully consider all viewpoints in their decision making processes.

- **CONSENSUS BASED DECISION MAKING???**



ALABAMA/NORTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL SERVICE COMMITTEE

Consensus Based Decision-Making : Have I Lost my Voice?



*It begins
with an
idea!*

Recovery is learning to live by spiritual principles.
CBDM is making decisions by spiritual principles

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**CONSENSUS BASED
DECISION MAKING**

CBDM

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CBDM Basics

What is Consensus-Based Decision Making?

The principle of anonymity in NA means we serve as equals, and CBDM is how a service body, as a team of equals, makes decisions. The heart of consensus is a cooperative intent, where members are willing to work together to find or create the solution that meets the needs of the group. The cooperative nature of consensus is a different mindset from pro/con debate.

The process rests on the fundamental belief that each member of the body has a piece of the Larger truth. In this spirit, striving for consensus is an affirmation of the principles inherent in both the Seventh and Ninth Concepts. Consensus may not mean total unanimity. In strict consensus, everyone agrees or gives their consent; a single dissenter can block a decision. Most NA service bodies, however, use some form of consensus-based decision making rather than strict consensus. CBDM does not require unanimity.

In CBDM, consensus exists when each member of the service body can say:

- I had the opportunity to voice my opinions
- I believe the team has heard me
- I can actively support the team's decision, even if it is not my first choice



*TO MOST OF US...
THIS SEEMED
CONFUSING AT FIRST
AND WE ASKED...*

WHY CHANGE THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS?

MANY OF US THOUGHT....
**WHAT WE WERE DOING...
GOT THE JOB DONE...!**

SOME ALSO THOUGHT...
**that this was going to be too time
consuming!**

WE WANTED TO CHANGE BECAUSE....

In some cases... just over half the room was on board with a decision.....what about the other 49 percent??

In some cases.... The majority of the service body had no input into the decisions that were being made...and when they did there was a limit of members to speak for or against, instead of inputting into the idea!

In some cases.... there was little discussion, leaving some of us confused about the decisions that were being made but some of us went along with it anyways.....

These ideas didn't seem to follow our 7th concept....



A Different Way of Making Decisions

(that more clearly follow our concepts)

All members of a service body bear substantial responsibility for that body's decisions and should be allowed to fully participate in its decision-making processes.

(7th Concept)

“NA service is a team effort. Our Service representatives are responsible to the NA fellowship as a whole rather than any special constituency; so are all other trusted servants on the team. The full participation of each member is of great value as we seek to express the collective conscience of the whole”.

(Twelve Concepts of NA Service, p 16)

How can a whole room of addicts agree on an issue?



Most of us, who are familiar with Robert's Rules of Order saw this as a problem... at first...

CBDM is a different way of thinking about coming to a resolve.

We either take a....

Discussion Topic or idea

We take an idea and work together to mold it into a proposal

Or

Specific Proposal

We take a proposal and work together to discuss if this will work best for the group, can be reworked into what the group wants

Roberts Rules of Order

- Robert's Rules is complicated and regimented
- The goal of Robert's Rules is to structure the debate and passage of proposals that win approval through majority vote (51%) or super majority (2/3)
- This process does not emphasize the goal of full agreement for the service body



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Robert's Rules of Order	Consensus Decision Making
Competitive, win/lose	Problem-solving, cooperative
Discussion constrained by motion	Multiple concerns and info can be considered
Discussion takes the form of a debate with a win-lose approach.	Discussion involves active listening and sharing information.
constraints are placed on the order and frequency of speaking.	Norms limit number of times one asks to speak to ensure that each speaker is fully heard.
Differences resolved by voting on motion.	Differences resolved by discussion. Facilitator identifies areas of agreement and names disagreements to push discussion deeper.
Chair calls for a vote.	Facilitator articulates the sense of the discussion, asks if the body understands topic and is ready to reach consensus.
Winners and losers are identified. Decision belongs to the winners.	Group as a whole is responsible for the decision, and the decision belongs to the group.
Chair's vote can determine the decision when votes are tied.	Facilitator can discern if a minority concerns' warrant a delay in a decision.
Dissenters' perspectives suppressed in majority vote.	Dissenters' perspectives are embraced and incorporated into decisions.

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The NA Traditions and Concepts need to be at the forefront of all the member's minds

Of note:

Tradition 2: For our group conscience, there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Tradition 12: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Concept 6: Group Conscience is the spiritual means by which we invite a loving God to influence our decisions.

Concept 7: All members of a service body bear substantial responsibility for that body's Decision and should be allowed to fully participate in its decision-making processes.

Concept 9: All elements of our service structure have the responsibility to carefully consider all viewpoints in their decision-making processes.

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Why Consensus-Based Decision Making?

- CBDM isn't just about particular policies or rules, or one or two specific Concepts or Traditions.
- It's about a group conscience process that connects us with a Higher Power.
- CBDM offers a potentially more inclusive process than parliamentary procedure, which can marginalize addicts who do not know "the rules" well. Our service bodies should be a forum where trusted servants can be heard, and CBDM is about listening. With its emphasis on inclusion, collaboration, and consensus-building, CBDM is in harmony with our spiritual principles.
- The consensus process is how we manifest the idea "together we can do what we cannot do alone" in a service setting.

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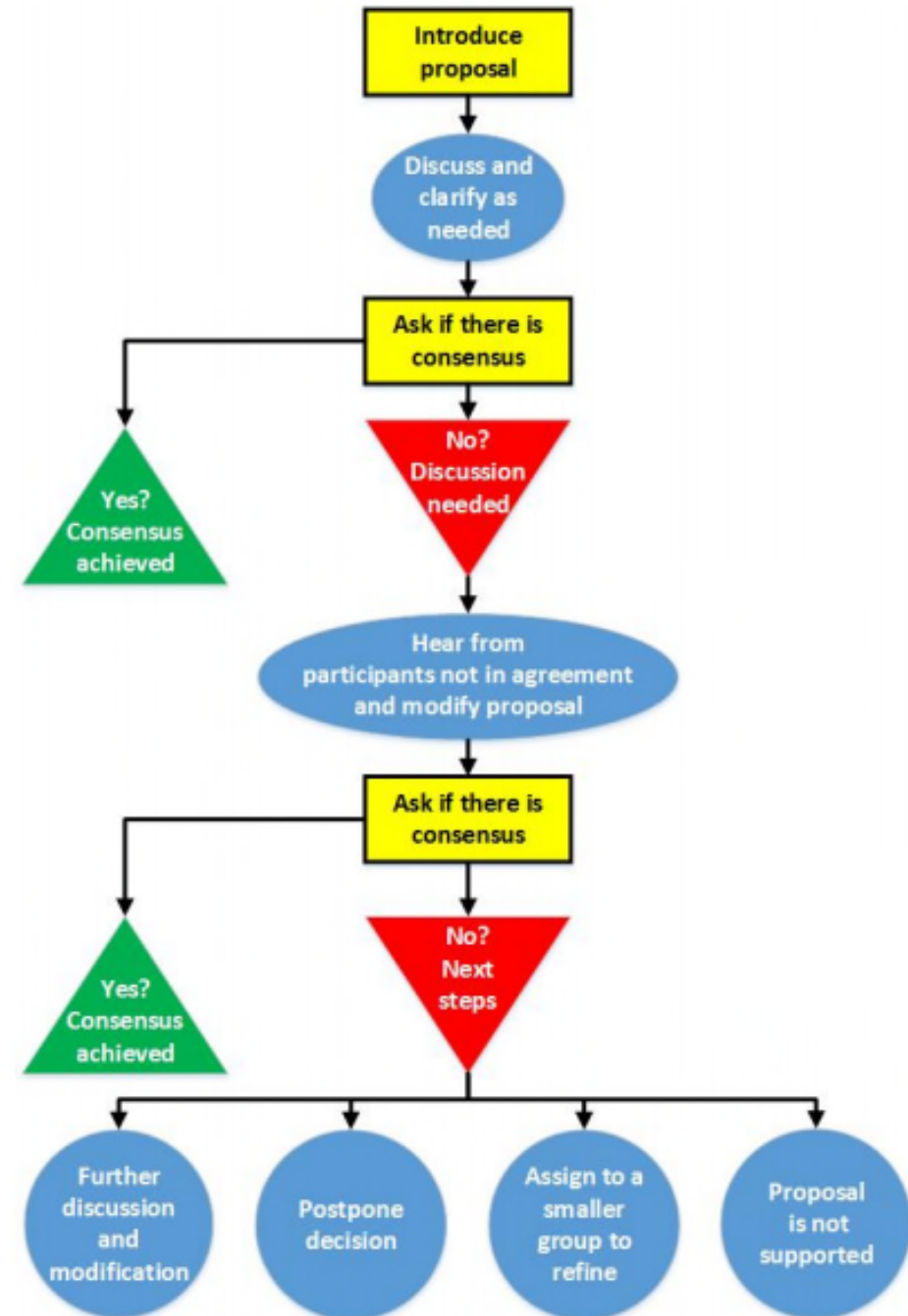
How does CBDM work?

There are different variations of CBDM, but,

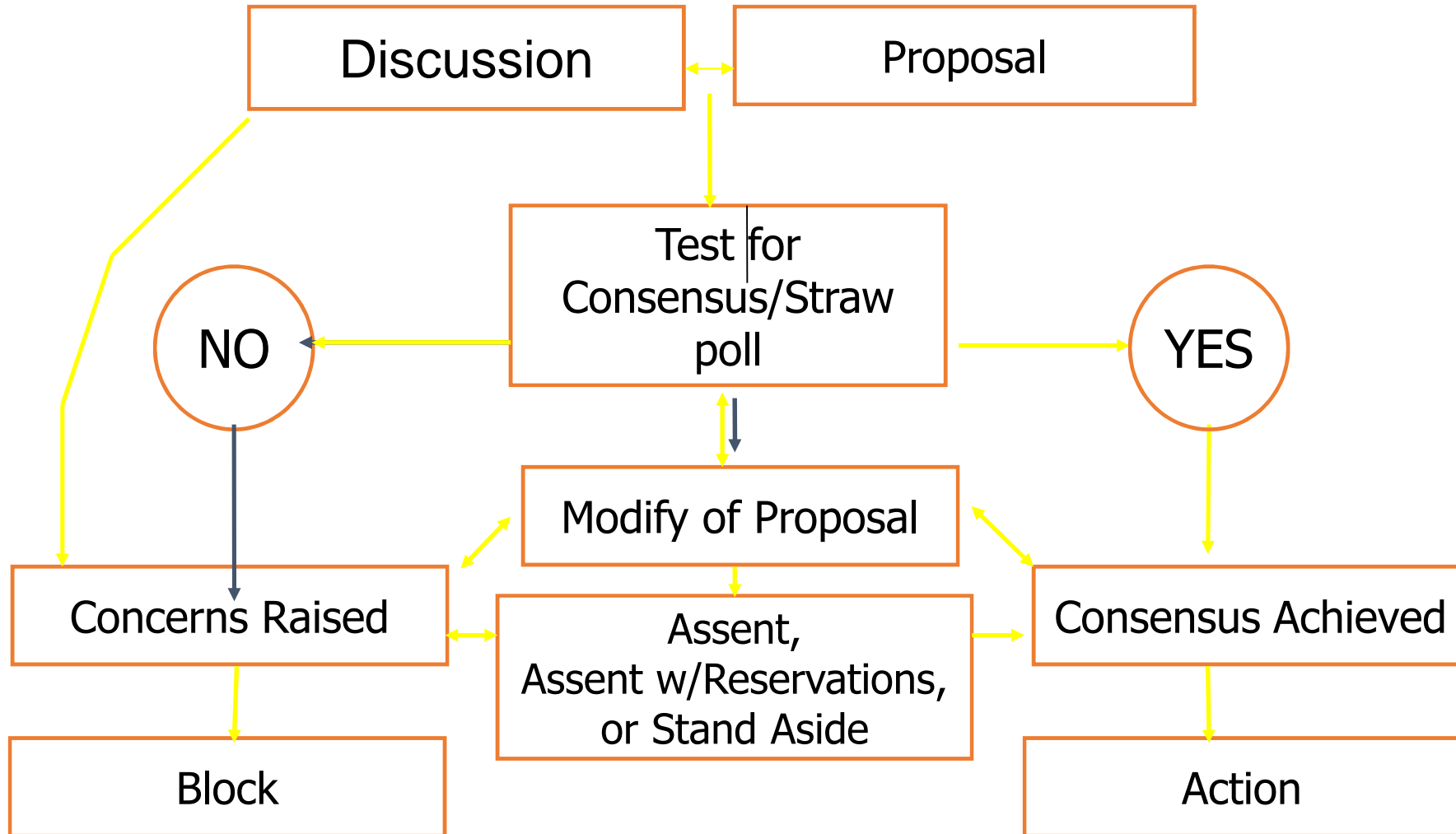
- The basic steps are fairly consistent.
- There is a great deal of variety depending on the individual service body's process and the type of decision being made.

The material in this section is intended to help service bodies understand how the basics of a consensus-based process work, and can be adapted to fit local needs.

Each NA community is free to create a process that works for them. Next, some of the details and variations are described.



How CBDM Works:



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Introduce proposal

Provide relevant details including:

- Why is the proposal necessary?
- What are the specific objectives of the proposal?
- What human and financial resources required?

Community decision: Who can introduce an idea or proposal?

- Most bodies allow only trusted servants (including delegates) to make proposals.
- In some bodies only delegates (GSRs, RCMs, and RDs) can make proposals.
- Other bodies will allow anyone present to make a proposal.

Discuss and clarify as needed

Asking questions, sharing resources, and offering experience and ideas are all parts of this phase of the process.

Community decision: Who can speak to an idea or proposal? It's common for consensus-based bodies to allow anyone present to speak, though some recognize trusted servants before hearing from interested members.

Ask if there is consensus

A simple way to do this is to ask the room "Is everyone comfortable with moving forward with this proposal?" If everyone is not in agreement then a show of hands (a straw poll) can be used to determine the level of support.

Community decision: Who can participate in a straw poll? It's common for any interested member to have a voice, but less common for everyone to participate in polls.

Some communities take a simple "for" and "against" vote to make a decision.

Others include options such as "agree with reservation" for members who basically agree with the proposal but have some issues that have not been addressed and "stand aside" for members who do not agree with the proposal but will not stand in the way of it passing.

Community decision: What is the threshold for achieving consensus? Some options include:

- Two-thirds majority
- 80%
- More?

If consensus isn't achieved in the straw poll then further discussion may be required. A very low level of support – "consensus not in support" – may indicate that no further discussion is needed, although care should be taken to ensure that the minority voice has been heard.

Hear from participants not in agreement and modify proposal

This phase allows those not in agreement to share their concerns. All participants are encouraged to listen and offers ideas for modifying the proposal. Not all concerns will lead to changes.

Further discussion and modification

An effective facilitator can help the body determine when to continue discussion and when to try something else.

Postpone decision

A simple option is to take a short break or to postpone the decision until the next service meeting.

Assign to a smaller group to refine

This may be a workgroup or an ad-hoc committee, a number of the service body's trusted servants, or any other group that has the experience to suggest a way forward. Providing clear guidance to this group is particularly important.

Proposal is not supported

Not every idea or proposal is supported, but CBDM allows all participants to be heard and to work together rather than argue opposing sides of a decision.

What types of decisions can we use CBDM for?

CBDM can be used to reach agreement on the type of decisions that are also made using parliamentary procedure. It can also be used to hold broader discussions that may not result in a specific decision. Each community is free to determine when a CBDM process will be most effective for them. Elections are one type of decision where it is common to simply seek a majority or a two-thirds vote rather than utilize a consensus-based decision making process.

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CBDM

....Is a cooperative process for making decisions in which everyone or nearly everyone consents to the decisions of the group

....Is a problem-solving method for people who wish to work together to find the best solution for the group

Basically means....

....The decision is in this room — our job is to find it
.....together

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Assent with Reservations –

“I think this may be a mistake but I can live with it”

(going along with this so we can move forward but not fully on board – not stopping what I see what the group wants to do)

Stand Aside –

“ I personally can’t do this, but I won’t stop others from doing it.”

(basically taking myself out of the equation – do not agree but will allow the group to move forward)

Block –

“I cannot support this or allow the group to support this.

It is against our principles.”

Blocking is a rare and extreme form of dissent taken only if you honestly believe that one of the Traditions or Concepts is directly violated by a proposal or that some very fundamental moral position would be violated.

A participant who blocks must be able to articulate which Tradition, Concept or Spiritual principle fundamental to NA is violated by the proposal.

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....there are times when a proposal can be a choice....members opinions....and more opportunity to disagree....so 80 percent would show solid support in these instances

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Facilitating a CBDM Body

CBDM requires a skilled facilitator who can guide the body in its decision making process. A good facilitator can prevent a discussion turning into an open sharing session and help everyone to reach a decision they can all agree with in a timely manner.

What does the facilitator (Chairperson) do?

The role of the facilitator is to help a group or service body reach consensus on an issue. To do this certain actions are required:

- Ensure everyone has a clear understanding of the process being used and the issue being discussed.
- Help everyone to participate, including the quieter members in the room.
- Listen for common ground and points of agreement and share these with the body.
- Repeat ideas that are shared to be sure everyone has a common understanding of them.
- Suggest ways to combine ideas to build consensus.
- Manage the time available and ensure enough is allocated for the proposal.
- Keep the conversation focused and move it forward towards a decision when needed.
- Ensure everyone has a clear understanding of any decisions that are made and any further actions that are required, and that these are recorded.

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Facilitating a CBDM Body (Con't)

Different communities will expect different levels of participation from their facilitator. Some require them to simply facilitate the meeting, while others encourage the facilitator to share information relevant to the discussion. Many facilitators find it easier to maintain the respect of the entire body by remaining neutral and providing information but not opinions.

Tips for Facilitators:

- Make eye contact, smile, and be enthusiastic.
- Be who you are – let your own style come through.
- Remember that communication isn't just the spoken word – for **example, try to avoid** “closed” body language such as crossing your arms or turning your back on your audience.
- Remember that listening is a key part of successful facilitation – listen first and speak second.
- Speak clearly so that everyone can hear, use a positive tone, and remember to breathe!

Useful questions for facilitators include:

- What have we tried before that works?
- If we tried this, what would happen next?
- Can anyone add anything to these ideas?

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What qualities does a facilitator need?

CBDM bodies need to think carefully when electing a facilitator and may find the Fourth Concept a useful resource. A good facilitator can feel the sense of the body and earn the trust needed to guide discussion toward a decision. Some of the qualities to look for include:

- Familiarity with the group or service body and an understanding of the experience level of those attending.
- Some experience with CBDM and a clear understanding of the details of the process being used locally.
- Being prepared with information about the issues being discussed and any relevant resources, such as guidelines, handbooks, and Traditions and Concepts materials.
- Commitment to the CBDM process and a willingness to focus on more than just their own ideas.
- The ability to earn the trust of a body by guiding rather than controlling discussions.
- Patience and the understanding that some participants may need more time to reach a decision than others.

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What spiritual principles can we apply?

As with all NA service, applying spiritual principles helps a CBDM body to be more successful. Some of the principles that we can focus on when facilitating are:

- Humility – an attitude of service rather than government allows a facilitator to focus on helping the body reach consensus.
- Open-mindedness – being open to new ideas is essential in helping to build consensus
- Accountability – a CBDM facilitator is a trusted servant and is accountable to the body they serve.
- Cooperation – the facilitator helps create an environment in which everyone can work together to understand and consider the proposal.
- Trust – a CBDM facilitator needs to both trust the process and the body they are serving.

Participating in a CBDM Body

The Seventh Concept essay reminds us that “NA service is a team effort. Our service representatives are responsible to the NA fellowship as a whole rather than any special constituency; so are all other trusted servants on the team. The full participation of each member is of great value as we seek to express the collective conscience of the whole.” Being an effective participant in a CBDM body is, in some respects, easier than being an effective participant in a parliamentary procedure-based body as there is no need to be proficient at Robert’s Rules or some other set or parliamentary guidelines. However, CBDM also requires some skills that parliamentary procedures do not.

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What do participants do?

Members of a CBDM body are required to work together to make decisions that can be supported by the entire body. To be successful in this, certain actions are required:

- Contribute towards a positive and respectful meeting environment where everyone feels comfortable contributing.
- Be prepared with the necessary information in advance of the discussion.
- Participate in the entire discussion process so that a clear understanding of all viewpoints can be gained.
- Ask questions when more information is needed.
- Consider what best serves our primary purpose rather than our personal preference.
- Commit to actively support the consensus of the body.

What qualities do participants need?

Participating in CBDM should help evolve a proposal so it is important to be flexible and to be a good listener. Some qualities that will help participants fulfill their role are:

- A focus on creating solutions rather than on finding fault with ideas.
- The willingness to share ideas and let go of the outcome. Remember that decisions can be revisited if needed.
- The ability to pass on making a point when someone else has already made it.
- An awareness of personal characteristics and circumstances, and how these may effect participation in the CBDM process. Examples of these include: irritability when tired or hungry, impatience with a slower decision making process, or intolerance of certain ideas.

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What spiritual principles can we apply?

Some of the principles we can focus on when participating in a CBDM body include:

- **Humility** – listening to others and understanding that we don't have all the answers is a foundational part of CBDM and is firmly rooted in the Second tradition.
- **Open-mindedness** – while CBDM carefully considers all viewpoints as discussed in the Ninth Concept, this does not mean that all opinions influence the final decision.
- **Patience** – allowing everyone the time to understand and consider the issue.
- **Trust** – CBDM participants need to trust the process and the facilitator they have chosen.
- **Unity** – whatever the outcome of discussions, everyone needs to work together to do the work involved to implement decisions.

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1 Introduction of topic

- Topics shall be presented as issues for discussion.
- The topic now belongs to the body.

2 Test for interest

- Topic must be prioritized for discussion.

3 Discuss Topic

- Focus on the issue that needs to be solved.
- The body achieves a thorough and common understanding of the issue.

4 Brainstorm solutions

- Ideas are presented and developed into proposals.

5 Clarify Proposal

- The Facilitator restates the proposal for clarity and the minutes.

6 Test for consensus

- 100% proceed with implementation.
- Less than 100% proceed to next step.

7 Hear Dissent

- Dissenters present their viewpoints.
- Body discusses the dissent, seeking understanding and solutions.
- Small group discussion, or a break may be necessary.

8 Test for consensus

- 100% proceed with implementation.
- Less than 100% proceed to next step.

9 Delay Consult Inform

- If possible delay the decision to the next meeting or later.
- Refer to the groups for consideration of the topic (not just the proposal)
- Form a workgroup.
- Seek more information.

10 Test for consensus

- 80% support shall be considered consensus
- 21% or greater BLOCK, consensus will not have been achieved

Degrees of Dissent:

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Assent with Reservations

“I think this may be a mistake, but I can live with it.”

Going along with the group so that we can move forward, but not fully on board not stopping what the group wants to do.

Stand Aside

“I personally cannot do this, but I will not stop others from doing this”

Basically taking yourself out of the equation You do not agree, but will allow the group to move forward. (A sizable number of stand asides may indicate that support for a proposal is too weak.) The content of the dissent is noted in the minutes.

Block

“I cannot support this or allow the group to support this, it is against our principles.” Blocking is a rare and extreme form of dissent taken only if you honestly believe that one of the Traditions or Concepts is directly violated by a proposal, or that some fundamental moral position would be violated.

A participant who blocks must be able to articulate which and how a tradition, concept, policy or spiritual principle fundamental to NA is being violated.

A block must be based on a generally recognized principle, not a personal preference. Before a concern is considered to be a “valid” block, the group must have accepted the validity of the concern, and a reasonable attempt must have been made to resolve it.

Consider:

Blocking a proposal is a last resort and only done in rare and extreme cases

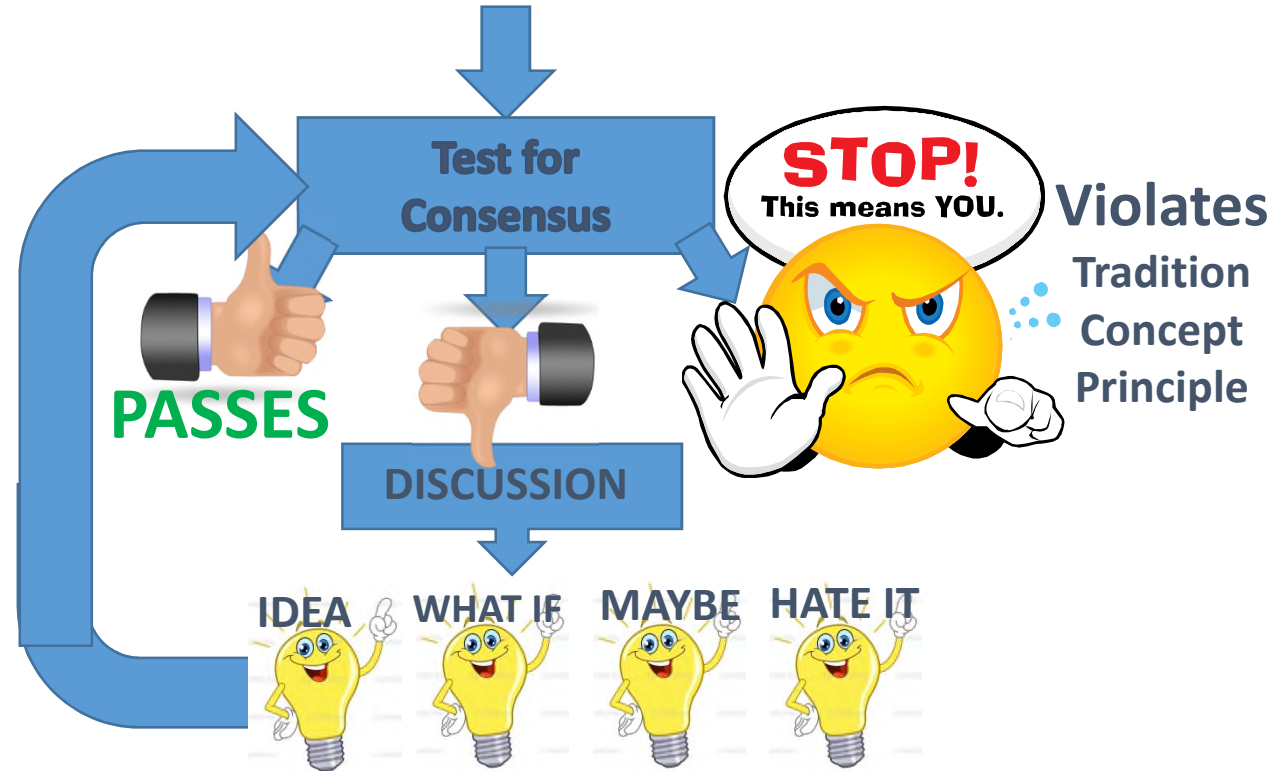
Can I put aside my personal opinion to allow the rest of the group to move forward?

Am I able to pass on making a point, when someone else has already made it?

Straw Polls are for information to assess where the body is at. They are not votes.

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Proposal



EVENTUALLY WE:

COME TO CONSENSUS

SEND TO MAKER

DROP IT

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Group Exercise

- The regional convention was successful financially and just made a donation of \$15,000. The region needs about \$2,000 to conduct business, so that leaves about \$13,000 remaining.
- A proposal was made and reads:
“Keep all the money and give to PR to carry the message in our region”
Intent: “To fulfill out primary purpose in our region”



“...as long as the ties that bind us...”



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Questions?