

Consensus Building Tips

What Is It?

To reach consensus is to give permission to go along with the total group. The implication of consensus is that there is general agreement that has been negotiated by the individuals involved. Listening, trust, sharing, and respect are values inherent in the process.

Consensus Means: All group members contribute. Everyone's opinions are heard and encouraged.

Differences are viewed as helpful. Everyone can paraphrase the issue. Everyone has a chance to express feelings about the issue. Those who disagree indicate a willingness to experiment for a certain period of time. All members share the final decision. All members agree to take responsibility for implementing the final decision.

Consensus Does NOT Mean: A unanimous vote is sought. The result is everyone's first choice. Everyone agrees (there may only be enough support for the decision to be carried out). Conflict and resistance will be overcome immediately.

Arbuckle, Margaret A. & Murray, Lynn B. (1989). *Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide*. Andover, MD: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.

100% Consensus (A Process to Shape Vision, Clarify Thinking, Develop Consensus)

1. Establish Topic or Purpose:
Clearly define the topic or purpose. You might find that stating it in the form of a question might make brainstorm sharing easier.
2. Group Scribing of Brainstorming
Recorder/scribe records on chart paper every word said during round robin brainstorm.
3. 100% Consensus
Using a list from brainstorming, the facilitator, in round robin format, asks for each item: "Is there anyone who objects to this item?" If someone objects to an item, word, phrase, etc. the scribe changes the item, word, phrase, etc. as indicated. This continues as long as there is an objection. (Items, words, phrases, etc. can be changed, returned to original, or changed again until everyone is satisfied—this surfaces any conflict for discussion, resolution, etc.) The process continues until everyone "passes" on each item. Do not try to put a time limit on this—do it until it is done, not with economy of time in mind.
4. Inclusive Connecting Statement
Volunteers, or scribes from each group if you have multiple groups, take the list(s) and create an inclusive, extensive narrative using all the words in the list(s). Meaning should be retained although tense, person, etc. may be changed to read smoothly.

Public Minutes:

- Have someone act as a recorder who writes the exact words of participants so everyone can see them on chart paper.
- Public minutes provide everyone access to all ideas being considered at all times rather than just the recorder. It also saves time to have the ideas all easily visible to everyone rather than to have the recorder continually reading them back to everyone.
- This strategy encourages people to be concise in their comments when they realize everything they say has to be written down.

Individual Reflection:

- Give everyone at least 1–2 minutes to jot down their ideas before sharing orally; this ensures that everyone has had an opportunity to get their ideas down rather than just going the direction of the ideas shared by the first one or two people.
- Individual reflection time gives those who are internal processors (need to reflect quietly on ideas)—as opposed to external processors (need to say ideas)—an opportunity to be active participants once the oral sharing begins.
- This strategy gives people an opportunity to get their ideas into a concise format before sharing orally.

Operational Definitions

- A term or concept to be defined is written on the chalkboard. Each member of a team writes his/her own definition, independent of the other team members.
- After all team members have written, each person's paper is passed to all other members of the team, one at a time. As each paper is read, key terms are underlined.
- As a group, the underlined terms are incorporated into one operating definition that is mutually agreed upon. Everyone has had ownership in the definition.

Clear Out Voting:

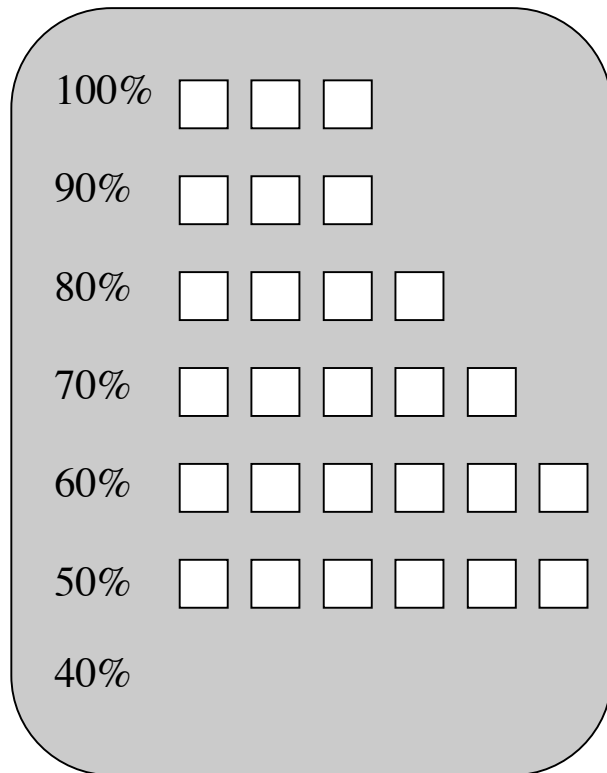
- Clear out voting is way to narrow the list to the ideas most of the people in the group prefer.
- The facilitator reads each item on the list and each participant holds up an open hand if they want to keep the item on the list or a closed fist if they want the item dropped. Items with more than half the group showing closed hands are crossed off with a single line.
- It is a good idea to make the statement that all of the ideas on the list are important, but you are unable to include them all so you are trying to narrow it to what is manageable at this time.

Weighted or Multi-Voting:

- The facilitator reads each item on the list and each participant holds up 1, 2 or 3 fingers depending on how important that item is to them. Encourage them to limit their "1" choices (least important) and "3" choices (most important) so that you can begin to separate the "vital few" from the "trivial many." For example, on a list of 10 items, encourage them to use a "1" and a "3" only once or twice each.
- Give them a few minutes to scan the list before you begin and determine which items will receive their top and bottom votes.
- Alternate strategy: Give each person a certain number of dots which they can divide up in any way they chose on the list of ideas generated. If you have 10 items on the list, you may want to give them 3–5 dots. They can put all of their dots on one item if it is very important to them, one dot each on separate items, or any combination in between. This is good to use when you are going into a break and need to do something with the information before people come back together again. It is also good when you have several lists coming together from different groups and you want all participants to respond to the combined lists.

Consensogram

1. Each person in the group is given a 3"x3" sticky note. To assure anonymity, do not put names on the sticky notes.
2. Determine what is going to be measured. (Examples: To what extent do you believe that harassment is a problem? To what extent do you believe that studying is related to school success? To what extent do you believe students should join extracurricular activities?) Write the question for everyone to see.
3. Each person writes down (in increments of 10%) what he thinks, feels, or where he stands on an issue. (Keep all answers between 0% and 100%; no negative numbers may be used.)
4. Collect the responses on the sticky notes.
5. Pick a place on a smooth surface and post the responses in the form of a histogram.
6. Discuss the findings.



Variation:

The difference between “perception” and “reality” may be shown through the use of the consensogram.

Questions such as “How many sophomores smoke? Drink? Shoplift?, etc.” may be posted.

In the first round, complete the consensogram as described. In the second round, students write “yes” or “no” as their own response to the question. The (reality) answers are then counted and compared to the perceived number of students who smoke, drink, etc.

Imagineering

1. Clearly state the objective of the Imagineering session (to identify what an individual or team envisions as the “perfect” or ideal project, process, situation, etc.).
2. Each person in the group is given 5 minutes to write down as many responses to the stated objective as possible.
3. The team compiles the responses.
4. The team reviews responses for clarity and justification. This process aids in the construction of a shared vision among the members of the team or class; it helps in goal setting to reach the “perfect” state.

Examples:

In my mind a “quality project” would be...

The perfect family situation would have...

My idea of being independent is...

The perfect job would...

An ideal date would be...

Fist to Five

In the Fist to Five process, once the task force or committee has indicated they are moving in a clear direction, the facilitator simply state the proposal or direction as he or she perceives it at this point. Then the facilitator asked every member of the group to indicate to the rest of the group how he or she feels about that direction based on a scale of fist to five.

Fist to Five simply means the following:

Fist	Signifies “block”—no support
One finger	Very little agreement lent will support the decision
Two fingers	Little agreement
Three fingers	Moderate agreement
Four fingers	High agreement
Five fingers	Complete agreement

In other words, Fist to Five provides a scale, from “no” vote to a “yes” vote, with varying degrees in between. If these are all threes, fours, and fives, the decision has been made by consensus.

Once everyone in the group has indicated how he or she feels, the leader should turn to any blocker and ask, “What part of our current proposal do you object to?” The reason for doing this is two-fold. First, one individual may see a problem that the rest have not seen. If that person holds up a fist and indicates that there is a problem, then it’s possible for others to “see the light,” compromise and save a lot of grief down the road. Secondly, it puts the responsibility or accountability where it rightfully belongs—with the person who has an objection. This forces that person to state openly to the rest of his or her colleagues exactly what he or she objects to and why. This reduces the possibility that the individual will simply object because he or she doesn’t feel well that day or he or she doesn’t like the person who proposed.

Fist to Five has other advantages:

- The leader knows that to implement a decision, the group should have no fewer than 65% in the 3–5 category, as long as there are not 20% organized against that decision. The closer that 3–5 category comes to 80%, the better chance for smooth implementation.
- The process also tells the leader where to invest his or her time. The greatest return will be realized if the leader invests the majority of his or her time with the 3s and 4s. The 4s are already predisposed to the idea and with good support and information, they may become leaders or 5s. The 3s, who are neutral on the issue to begin with, again with good support and information, may become 4s. The more who become 4s and 5s, the greater chance there is for a smooth, strong implementation.

Turn to Your Partner (TTYD)

When you have a great deal of information to share or when you want people to internalize a concept before you move on to another concept, it is a good idea to let them talk to someone else about it briefly.

- Ask participants to pair up with 1 other person and take 5 minutes to discuss what they heard, or what was important to them in what they heard, or how they could apply what they heard to their own situation, etc. What you ask them to do depends on the content of what has been shared and where you are going next in the agenda.
- At the end of the 5 minutes you can ask if any one had anything really important that they would like to share with the whole group, but it is not necessary for this strategy to be effective and sometimes takes more time than you want to give. The important part of the strategy is that they can talk about their ideas to someone else, not that they hear all ideas in the room.
- If you are presenting to a group and there seems to be a lot of side-bar conversations going on in the room—it may not be that you have lost their attention. It may be that what you are saying is so important to them that they need the opportunity to process it out loud with someone else. That is a good time to use this strategy.
- When you use it for consensus building, it is a good idea to take time at least every 30 minutes to use this strategy and have people turn to a different partner each time so ideas in the room can begin to build on each other.

Pair-Square

- Start participants in a small group of 3 or 4 people. Rationale: most people will be more comfortable to share their ideas in a small group, but not too small or they often get “stuck.”
- Be sure you have an even number of groups whose combinations will eventually result in 2 groups coming together.

For example if you have 8 groups:

First combination: 8 Groups 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8
Second combination: 4 Groups 1 & 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6; 7 & 8
Third combination: 2 Groups 1, 2, 3 & 4; 5, 6, 7, & 8
Fourth Combination: 1 Group 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8

It won't work as well if you have 6 groups:

First combination: 6 Groups 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6
3 Groups 1 & 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6
? Groups ??

- Be sure to ask each group to appoint a facilitator to keep them on time and on task and a recorder for public minutes. They need to be prepared to take their public minutes with them to the combination groups.
- At each move they need an opportunity to ask for clarification of items. Only the group/person who contributed the item may give the clarification response.
- Push them to reduce their list at each move so that you end up with a reasonable number of items to work with depending on the situation/need.
- Combinations of items can occur if they are the same but discourage combinations to just get to a smaller list because the items lose meaning.

Reaching Consensus

Your Thinking







1. What are our **current** practices?
2. What are the **beliefs** that support current practices?
3. What are **evidences** that current practices are working/not working?
4. What are the **“suggested”** practices?
5. What are the **beliefs** that support “suggested” practices?
6. What is the best we can hope for if we **don’t** explore the “suggested” practices?
7. What is the best we can hope for if we **do** explore the “suggested” practices?
8. Is it **worth** it?
9. What are the **conditions** that would increase the probability of best results?

Other’s Thinking

Six Hat Thinking

<p style="text-align: center;">Information</p> <p>Allows neutrality Explores facts and figures with NO interpretations or opinions Uses focusing questions...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much? • How often? • How long? • How many? • Who? • Fact or belief? • Fact or likelihood? 		<p style="text-align: center;">Benefits</p> <p>Allows positive constructive assessment Explores the benefits & values, & the dreams & visions Uses focusing questions...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the objective? • What is the idea based on? • How will it get us (me) closer to the vision? • Who will benefit? • How will it help? • What are the benefits? 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Judgment</p> <p>Allows logical negative assessment Explores risks, dangers and inconsistencies with past experiences Not an argument Uses focusing questions...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are any errors in the facts? • What roadblocks are there? • Is it worth doing? • What risks are there? • Who will be affected negatively? 		<p style="text-align: center;">Feelings</p> <p>Allows for the legitimizing of emotions & feelings Explores ordinary emotions such as fears, dislikes, suspicions & complex emotions like hunches, intuitions, senses & aesthetics No need to justify or give reason for feelings or emotions Uses focusing statement...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This makes me feel... • When I think of all this will take I feel... • When I think of what I will have to do to be able to make this idea work, I feel... 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Creativity</p> <p>Allows for creation of new ideas and responsible changes Explores new approaches, routes, options, choices, avenues, structures, resources, and methods. Uses focusing statements...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chance for success is greater if we (I)... • What if? • I wonder? • Where could this take us? • How many different ways can we attack the problem? 		<p style="text-align: center;">Actions</p> <p>Allows control of the thinking & organizes it into action Produces summaries, overviews, conclusions, suggested directions & next step action Uses focusing questions...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the first step? • Where do we go from here? • Who do we need to communicate our plan? • Who will be the taskmaster? • What checkpoints or benchmarks or timelines can be proposed? 	

Six Hat Thinking

INFORMATION 	What are the facts?
BENEFITS 	What are the good points?
JUDGMENT 	What is/could be wrong with this?
FEELINGS 	What do I feel about this?
CREATIVITY 	What new ideas are possible?
ACTIONS 	How can we put our ideas into action?

CAF – Consider All Factors

Thinking/Reasoning Skill - decision making, planning, drawing conclusion, making judgment

Purpose:

CAF = Consider All Factors

When you have to choose or make a decision or just think about something, there are always many factors that you have to consider. If you leave out some of these factors, your choice may seem right at the time but will later turn out to be wrong. When you are looking at other people's thinking, you can try and see what factors they have left out.

Principles:

- Doing a CAF is useful before choosing, deciding or planning.
- It is better to consider all the factors first, then pick out the ones that matter most.
- You may have to ask someone else to tell you whether you have left out some important factors.
- If you have left out an important factor, your answer may seem right but will later turn out to be wrong.
- If you do a CAF on someone else's thinking, you may be able to tell the person what has been left out.

Process Tips:

People naturally assume that they have considered all the factors, but usually their consideration is limited to the obvious ones. Turning CAF into a deliberate operation switches attention from the importance of the factors to looking around for all the factors. Clearly, it is difficult to consider all the factors, so in the teaching situation consideration can be limited to the ten most important factors (or any other number), or the lesson can be taught in terms of:

- the factors affecting oneself
- the factors affecting other people
- the factors affecting society in general

- *This gives the lesson structure.*

C A F – Consider All Factors

Your Thinking



Other Thinking

Four Corners

Procedure:

Label Corners: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

Place strongest opinions in diagonal corners, the furthest apart.

Hand Out List of issues or belief statements, be clear that they MAY NOT put their names on them.

Have them privately label each statement w/code:

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

Collect, shuffle and redistribute, telling people that they must put it back in the mix if they recognize it to be their own.

Tell them that when they move to a corner, they must meet and greet one another (handshake, names, etc.) and subgroup themselves into groups of no more than five so that they will be part of the discussion.

Once they have done that, then they will have one or two minutes to brainstorm that issue from that perspective—whether it agrees with their thinking or not.

They must **appoint** a spokesperson that will share their group's thinking when called upon.

Call Off the number of the item or the issue and have them move to the corner that represents the person whose paper they are carrying.

Lead the discussion by moving back and forth from group to group, keep the talk positive. Record their responses.

Once the issues have been openly talked through, then have the group try to summarize or generate their beliefs about the issue and what actions should be taken.

Four Corners

CODE:
SA=Strongly Agree **A**=Agree **D**=Disagree **SD**=Strongly Disagree

Issues

____ 1.

____ 2.

____ 3.

____ 4.

____ 5.

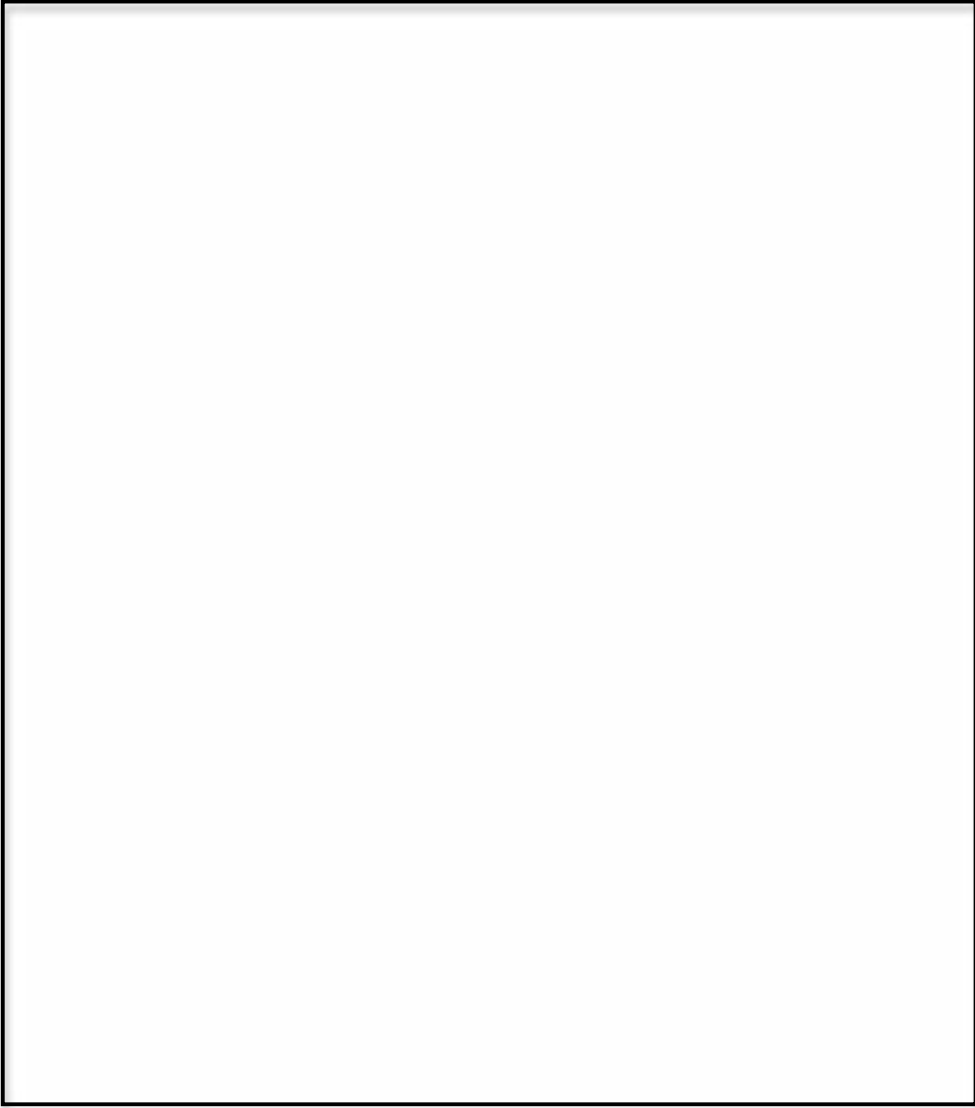
____ 6.

____ 7.

____ 8.

____ 9.

____ 10.



OPV – Other People’s Views

Focus:

OPV is the process of looking at other people’s viewpoints.

Being able to look at and understand another person’s point of view may be a very important part indeed of the thinking process, and so a deliberate effort may have to be made to see another point of view. This deliberate effort is the OPV. It may apply to another person’s point of view or to other people’s points of view in general.

OPV = Other People’s Views:

Many thinking situations involve other people. What these other people think is just as much part of the situation as the factors, the consequences, the objectives, etc. These other people may have a very different viewpoint. Although they are in the same situation, they may look at things very differently. It is a very important part of thinking to be able to tell how other people are thinking, trying to see things from another person’s viewpoint is what doing an **OPV** is about. Another person may consider different factors (**CAF**), see different consequences (**C & S**), have different objectives (**AGO**), or priorities (**FIP**). In fact, all the thinking that you do for yourself, others may be doing for themselves - but differently.

Principles:

- You ought to be able to see the other point of view whether you agree with it or not.
- Every point of view may be right for the person holding it, but not right enough to be imposed on others.
- Different people have different positions, backgrounds, knowledge, interests, values, wants, etc., so it is not surprising that in the same situation viewpoints may differ greatly.
- Try to see whether the other person can see your viewpoint.
- Be able to articulate the differences and similarities between viewpoints.

OPV: Other People's Views

	AGREE	
	Why:	
STRONGLY DISAGREE		STRONGLY AGREE
Why:		Why:
	DISAGREE	
	Why:	