

Exploring Ways to Work Together

Decision-Making Models: Voting versus Consensus

As you begin working with new partners, it's important to consider *how* you will make decisions—from the big resolutions to the ordinary, everyday choices. Who has the ultimate decision-making authority for the team? Will members be involved in making all decisions, or only some of them? Will the majority rule, or will all decisions require unanimous support?

The chart below compares two common decision-making approaches: voting and consensus. Use the chart to determine which method is best for your team. You may also choose a hybrid approach—inviting members to vote on less weighty decisions while building consensus for more important ones. Whichever approach—or combination of approaches—you choose, what's important is that you are transparent about the process so members know what to expect.

Method	Voting	Consensus
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority determines decisions (with the group first defining "majority"). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every partner voices a position. All team members agree to support the ultimate decision, even when it's not everyone's favorite choice.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiar, conventional, efficient Considered "fair" by most Useful when time constraints make reaching consensus difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures buy-in of all members, thus increasing the likelihood of success. Members strive to make the best decision for the group rather than competing for personal preferences. All perspectives are taken into account.

Method	Voting	Consensus
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not allow for discussion of minority opinions May not encourage full-group interaction Creates winners and losers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-consuming The larger the group, the more difficult to execute Can be contentious Sometimes tedious
Variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plurality: A large block of members supports a given decision. Range Voting: Each member scores each option, then the option with the highest average score wins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fist-to-Five: Team members use specific hand signals to: block consensus (fist), suggest changes (one finger), discuss minor issues (two fingers), pass without discussion (three fingers), affirm the decision (four fingers), or volunteer to take a lead in implementing the new decision (five fingers). Red/Yellow/Green Colored Cards: A red card indicates opposition to the decision, a yellow card indicates reservations, and a green card signifies consent.
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group may need to decide which individuals are “voting” members (e.g., based on length of participation, attendance at a minimum number of meetings). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helpful to use an experienced facilitator to guide discussions Helpful to record decision points on a flip chart to avoid ambiguity and ensure that everyone understands the different options

Reference

Education Development Center, Inc. (2013). How do we make decisions? Retrieved from www.promoteprevent.org