

## Consensus Based Decision Making

In consensus based decision making, the Board chair coordinates a discussion around an agenda topic that requires a decision by the Board (***before a motion is made***). In a mature organization with good management, Management usually will have provided a background document (information) for Board consideration that includes a recommendation for the Board's approval. The chair facilitates a discussion with the aim of reaching consensus, or close to full consensus. Once the Chair feels everyone has participated and that there seems to be consensus, he/she would call for a motion, then call for a vote. In a situation where consensus cannot be reached, the Chair would seek a tabling motion and defer the matter for further work and then bring it back to the Board at a future date.

I favored a Board agenda that included **information items** (usually circulated in the Board package sent out in advance of the meeting) as well as **decision items** – these are the items debated using consensus based decision making.

**Consensus decision-making** is a group decision-making process in which group members develop, and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole group or common goal. Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favorite" of each individual. It has its origin in the Latin word *consensus* (agreement), which is from *cōnsentiō* meaning literally *feel together*. It is used to describe both the decision and the process of reaching a decision. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned with the process of deliberating and finalizing a decision, and the social, economic, legal, environmental and political effects of applying this process.

### Objectives

As a decision-making process, consensus decision-making aims to be:

- **Agreement Seeking:** A consensus decision-making process attempts to generate as much agreement as possible.
- **Collaborative:** Participants contribute to a shared proposal and shape it into a decision that meets the concerns of all group members as much as possible.
- **Cooperative:** 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.
- **Egalitarian:** 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.
- **Inclusive:** As many stakeholders as possible should be involved in the consensus decision-making process.
- **Participatory:** The consensus process should actively solicit the input and participation of all decision-makers.