

How to Choose the Right Decision-Making Process(es)



It's easy to get stuck in the habit of always making decisions a certain way. In order to choose the right decision-making process, we must do the following:

1. **Get clear on what decision is being made.** If it's a mix of inter-related decisions, lay those out clearly and think about which decisions need to be made before other decisions, and how they impact each other. [Plan out the steps you'll be taking to make the decision\(s\).](#)
2. **Assess how important this decision is.** The more people who are significantly impacted by the decision, the more intensive the process likely needs to be. [Use this tool to consider the strategic implications.](#)
3. **Remember that you are not alone in making your decision.** Don't hesitate to ask your supervisor or team for advice on how to develop an effective process, and think creatively about how to engage others in a collaborative decision-making process.

You can mix and match many different decision-making tools and approaches:

- ☐ **Decide and announce** – If this is a small/unimportant/repetitive decision, and you have all the information you need, you can just decide on your own and act on it. Remember you may still need to announce/explain your decision, even if you make it on your own.
- ☐ **Gather input from individuals and you decide** – If this decision only impacts a few people and/or is not very important, then you may collect feedback individually, particularly from your supervisor and people outside your organization with useful expertise. You might also use a survey or other interactive tools to gather input from many people quickly.
- ☐ **Gather input from group and you decide** – Often, your program team will be a good place to go for advice on important decisions, and/or you may want to convene other groups (such as partner organizations that are significantly impacted), and use different facilitators' tools, such as dot-voting, to do a temperature check and/or identify areas of shared agreement or priority.
- ☐ **Make a small group decision** – For very important/challenging decisions, you may need agreement among a few key people who are most involved in the realm(s) most impacted by a given decision. If that group of people has built trust to be able to creatively collaborate and openly disagree, you can choose to give that small group shared power over a given decision, where all participants must be in agreement before a decision can move forward.
- ☐ **Make a large group decision** - For very important, organization-wide decisions like setting strategic priorities, you will likely want to involve all staff in the decision. You can use tools such as [fist-to-five](#) or the [consent principle](#) to make group decisions. These approaches offer individuals the opportunity to provide more nuanced feedback than simple voting, and you can put guardrails in place to ensure that decisions can still move forward unless someone can identify a risk that the group cannot afford to take. Be sure to decide in advance what you will do if the decision is blocked, and communicate that transparently.
- ☐ **Ask someone else to make the decision** – If you're not sure whether you should be making this decision, get advice from others. If you do ask someone else to make a decision, remember that you cannot override their decision, since it is no longer your decision to make. Consider whether you need to put some constraints on the decision (e.g. setting guidelines/budget/criteria) in order for the other person to be able to make the decision well.
- ☐ **Instead of trying to make a big decision, make a smaller decision to test an approach** – if you are finding it difficult/time-consuming to make a big decision, you can decide to test an approach much more quickly. Since testing something out does not change things forever, it has less of an impact on other people. Try using [design thinking](#) or other experimenting tools to quickly prototype and iterate options, instead of trying to decide everything in advance.