

Example of a Decision Making Proposal for a Mutual Aid Group

Building Capacity for Mutual Aid Groups Workshop, BCRW, Nov 11, 2021, Dean Spade

Proposal: Consensus decision-making as backdrop method of the group

- We decide things through consensus--mostly “casual consensus” meaning we care about anyone’s objections, we don’t “outvote” each other, we bring proposals and alter them to make them work for everyone and approve them when its something everyone can live with
- We bring proposals to meetings and then ask for concerns, make changes, and either come to consensus or send back to committee for more work
- We only use “formal consensus” when we are facing strong conflict (go to the [On Conflict and Consensus](#) book)

Benefits of Consensus

- Everyone gets heard rather than majority voting to ignore smaller group’s concerns
- More buy in--proposals refined until they make sense to everyone or at least aren’t too objectionable to anyone
- We get to try out not needing things to go *exactly* our way but instead getting things to be good enough, and caring that they are good enough for others too
- Work happens between meetings, deep thinking and development of ideas, and then gets refined in the big group

Note: even if something is a whole group decision, it’s often best if a team or person develops a proposal first that people can work through and refine together so we don’t have to do every part of the thinking in the biggest group.

Whole Group Decisions

- Any kind of negotiating concessions around our demands
- Changing our core message
- Whether to work with certain groups or individuals or not
- Whether to take money and/or use money
- Whether to endorse or participate in coalitions, events, campaigns, sign on letters (this one is often time-sensitive, so we might want to have a plan where if it is time sensitive we agree to a protocol where if its very aligned with our message someone could propose on email and signal and if they get 4 (or some number) yeses they can go forward, but if its iffy or someone raises a concern we slow down til we can hash it out)

Team Decisions

- Communications team finalizes graphics and language for posts and micro work of posting timing and such. Makes decisions required to build social media campaign like reposting other groups' or indivs' posts.
- Research team makes decisions about how to do the research that the whole group or other teams have asked for.
- Local gov't/community orgs team makes decisions about scheduling meetings with local gov't or community orgs, how to implement outreach, how to prioritize outreach.
- Inside/Outside relationships team makes decisions about timing and amount of communications and implementing plans to expand or deepen communications with WA prisoners and their loved ones.

Other notes:

- Using fishbowls and caucuses to have conversations in specific groups to recognize power dynamics among us, and specific wisdom of targeted groups
- Finding more ways to include people calling in from prisons in our meetings and run strategy questions by people inside via phone, jpay, or mail.