

Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

December 2011

Written by: Kathy Nesteby

Iowa Task Force for Young Women



Walking the Walk

Of the existing procedural models used for conducting meetings, consensus decision-making is the model that complements female responsive principles most. Unlike hierarchical or adversarial models, it emphasizes cohesive interpersonal relationships, something I would argue is the cornerstone of female responsive services to our young women.

A common misconception is that consensus requires unanimity. Instead, consensus works to achieve overwhelming agreement. Working to achieve this level of agreement requires the inclusion of everyone's ideas and concerns in proposed solutions rather than exercising "majority rule". It is a creative and dynamic process that necessitates working together with a common goal or unity of purpose as a guide. In order to be successful, group members must put that common purpose above personal priorities and therefore trust between group members must exist for consensus decision-making to be effective.

Consensus also depends upon equal access to power among the members of the group. This equal access allows ideas to be expressed and then woven together into the best possible solution rather than putting them in competition with each other, which can ultimately result in the loss of some in the end.

Inclusive solutions are often better not only because they have taken the best from many sources but because they are more likely to be implemented due to the buy-in that is facilitated by the process itself. When group members feel heard and become invested in the end result, they naturally become advocates for it.

Steps in a Consensus Model

1. Introduce the issue (agenda item) to be decided and answer related questions
2. Discuss the issue and identify an emerging proposal as well as key concerns
3. Clarify and amend the proposal weaving together the best elements of all ideas put forth
4. Test for agreement*
 - a. Blocks - used only when serious concerns have been unresolved or when a member feels the decision would be irrevocably damaging to the common goal of the group
 - b. Stand asides - used when you disagree with a proposal but you are willing to allow the group to go ahead with it or because you may not have the time or energy to actively support it
 - c. Support - agreement with the proposal
- *If there are stand asides that can be resolved or any blocks, return to Step 3
5. Plan actions, set deadlines and determine responsible parties for the agreed upon proposal

Resources

Atlee, T. and Zubizarreta, R. "Comparison of Robert's Rules of Order, Consensus Process and Dynamic Facilitation". v. 2.03. <http://www.co-intelligence.org/I-comparisonRR-CC-DF.html>

Dorter, A. "Meeting Processes/Decision-Making at the 2110". 2008. <http://www.consensusdecisionmaking.org/index.html>

Hartnett, Tim. PhD. "The Basics of Consensus Decision-Making" <http://www.GroupFacilitation.net>

MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Program. "A Short Guide to Consensus Building". <http://web.mit.edu/publicdisputes/practice/index.html>

Seeds for Change. "Consensus Decision Making" www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources

Gender Responsive Program Assessment tool, site visit and technical assistance

Created by Dr. Stephanie Covington and Dr. Barbara Bloom (Center for Gender and Justice) and based on their earlier work for the National Institute of Corrections, this tool facilitates program evaluation of services to females involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system, whether in single or mixed gender environments. There is no cost associated with the assessment (a minimum \$925 value) or follow-up training/technical assistance. It is part of the ongoing effort of the Iowa Task Force for Young Women to facilitate a comprehensive fundamental change in the juvenile justice system that will enhance the understanding and utilization of innovative gender-responsive approaches in all programs and services.

Programs completing the assessment process will receive a certificate, program recognition at the annual Whispers & Screams conference and priority ranking for scholarships to attend the conference.

If you have questions or are interested in scheduling an assessment, please contact:

Kathy Nesteby ~ Coordinator, Iowa Task Force for Young Women
Iowa Department of Human Rights
515-281-6915 or Kathy.nesteby@iowa.gov

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Kathy Nesteby, Coordinator
Iowa Task Force for Young Women
(515) 281-6915
Kathy.Nesteby@iowa.gov
www.women.iowa.gov/girls

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Iowa Task Force for Young Women
Department of Human Rights
Lucas State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319