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Responsible Officer(s)	Associate Dean, Postgraduate Medical Education

Planetary Health Subcommittee Terms of Reference

Part I: Mandate and Responsibilities

1. **Mandate**

The Planetary Health (PH) Committee is a Subcommittee of the Postgraduate Medical Education Committee at Queen's University and is accountable to the Associate Dean, Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME). The PH Committee (hereafter "the Committee") is responsible for the strategic implementation of PH initiatives and education within postgraduate medical education. The Committee will provide expertise to support the Planetary Health Lead to develop the PH framework and curriculum, and to work with internal and external invested partners (e.g., faculty and medical students) to facilitate novel PH curricula and opportunities for Queen's residents.

PH may be defined as the concept that human health depends on the health of the planet, including environmental and climate health. PH principles in healthcare promote delivering high quality care that improves individual health while also addressing and mitigating the impact of climate issues on population health, particularly in vulnerable groups.

The Committee will provide support and guidance to Program Directors, faculty and administrative staff as they implement initiatives, curriculum and programs related to PH.

2. Major Responsibilities

The Committee will endeavor to adhere to the mission and policies of the Queen's School of Medicine.

The purpose of the Committee is to support and be actively involved in the development of a planetary health initiatives and curriculum within PGME at Queen's University. The collective experience of the Committee will be an asset that can be utilized to support the development of a framework for PH education which will lead to an interesting, innovative curriculum for residency training at Queen's University. The Committee will actively include and engage residents and faculty, with representation from community/sustainability partners as needed. The curriculum will include experiential service learning.

The Committee is responsible to support activities related to PH education in PGME at Queen's University, including but not limited to:
- Development of strategies, frameworks, and resources to assist Postgraduate Residency Programs in implementing PH curricula
- Support the development of PH QI projects in Postgraduate Residency Programs
- Share and collaborate with other provincial academic programs and curricula
- Support resident wellness through acting on climate change
- Develop relationships with community partners to allow residents to participate in service- learning experiences in sustainable healthcare
- Promote and support scholarly activity related to PH
- Provide an annual report of the group's activities to the Postgraduate Medicine Education Committee

3. Access to Information

Members of the subcommittee will have access to documents required to inform the effective management of the committee.

Part II: Leadership & Membership

4. Membership

Members will be chosen by the Planetary Health Lead based on experience and expression of interest, with a goal to have broad representation and a culture of inclusivity

Core Committee:

Planetary Health Lead (Chair)
Faculty representatives (3 minimum – 2 RC specialty, 1 CFPC)
Resident Representation (3-6 – different programs)
Community engagement (1 – partner representing voice for local sustainable health)
Undergraduate medical students (max 3)
Other interested people from the school of medicine (2)
Administrative and operational support: PGME staff (up to 2)

Ex-Officio: PGME Staff administrative and operational support
- Guests/Observers: may be invited at the discretion of the Chair and/or the recommendation of current members
- Guests may include members from other provincial universities, local community organizations, student representatives, etc.

5. **Term of Membership:**

Members will be appointed for an initial one-year term, and eligible for renewal annually, if they remain interested in serving on the committee. Interest is defined as participating regularly in meetings and contributing to collegial discourse and debate in promoting PH initiatives and curriculum.

6. **Responsibilities of Members:**
- Attend meetings
- Read pre-circulated material
- Participate in discussions
- Communicate committee activities and report feedback at meetings
- Participate in Ad Hoc committees as required

Part III: Meeting Procedures

7. **Frequency and Duration of Meetings:**
- The subcommittee meets every 2 months
- Additional meetings may be called at the discretion of the Chair.

8. Decision-Making

Decisions are made by consensus. The process for consensus is appended to the Terms   of Reference.

9. Conflict of Interest

Members must declare conflict of interest to Chair in advance who will determine an appropriate course of action.

10. Confidentiality:

All documents and files reviewed and prepared by members of the committee are confidential unless otherwise stipulated.

Part IV: Administrative Support & Communication

11. Administrative Support:

Provided by the Postgraduate Medical Education Office.

12. Agendas & Minutes:

Agendas and Minutes to be distributed electronically to all members in the
MS Teams folder.

Agendas and minutes are available to others upon request.

13. Reporting Relationship:

The Committee is a subcommittee of the PGMEC and will report to PGMEC annually, and as required

14. Evaluation:

Terms of reference to be formally reviewed by the PH Subcommittee and by the Postgraduate Medical Education Committee every third (3) year, and as required

APIRG

Consensus Decision Making Process

The Alberta Public Interest Research Group

At APIRG, the consensus process will be used as the primary decision-making process to for all issues, meeting agenda items, or choices presented. If the use of the consensus process is found to be inappropriate or a decision by consensus is unattainable on a specific issue, conflict or situation, the APIRG Board of Directors will move to a majority vote decision-making process where approval of a decision or passed motion requires a 2/3 majority vote of the Board (quorum).

The Consensus decision-making process is considered an acceptable substitute of the voting decision-making process referred to in APIRGs bylaws.

Consensus

Consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all. Through consensus, we are not only working to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust.

Why use consensus?

Consensus does not mean that everyone thinks that the decision made is necessarily the best one possible, or even that they are sure it will work. What it does mean is that in coming to that decision, no one felt that her/his position on the matter was misunderstood or that it wasn't given a proper hearing. Hopefully, everyone will think it is the best decision; this often happens because, when it works, collective intelligence does come up with better solutions than could individuals.

Consensus Procedure

1. **A proposal for resolution is put forward.**
2. **Amend and modify proposal through discussion**
3. **Those participants that disagree with the proposal have the responsibility to put forward alternative suggestions.**
4. **The person that put forward the proposal, with the assistance of the facilitator, can choose to withdraw proposal if seems to be a dead end.**

The fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will. The fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard. Coercion and trade-offs are replaced with creative alternatives, and compromise with synthesis.

5. **When a proposal seems to be well understood by everyone, and there are no new changes asked for, the facilitator(s) can ask if there are any objections or reservations to it.**
   See WAYS TO EXPRESS YOUR OBJECTIONS

6. **If there are no objections, the facilitator can call for consensus.**
7. **If there are still no objections, then after a moment of silence you have your decision.**
8. **If consensus does appear to have been reached, the facilitator will repeat the decision to the group so everyone is clear on what has been decided.**

Ways to Express your objections

If a decision has been reached, or is on the verge of being reached that you cannot support, there are several ways to express your objections:

1. **Non-support** ("I don't see the need for this, but I'll go along.")

2. **Reservations** ('I think this may be a mistake but I can live with it.")

3. **Standing aside** ("I personally can't do this, but I won't stop others from doing it. ")

4. **Blocking** ("I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. It is immoral." If a final decision violates someone's fundamental moral values they are obligated to block consensus.)

5. **Withdrawing from the group**. Obviously, if many people express non-support or reservations or stand aside or leave the group, it may not be a viable decision even if no one directly blocks it. This is what is known as a "lukewarm" consensus and it is just as desirable as a lukewarm beer or a lukewarm bath.

If consensus is blocked and no new consensus can be reached, the group stays with whatever the previous decision was on the subject, or does nothing if that is applicable. Major philosophical or moral questions that will come up will have to be worked through as soon as the group forms.

Group Roles in consensus procedures at APIRG meetings

1. Facilitators will be selected on a rotating or volunteer basis
The facilitator(s) aids the group in defining decisions that need to be made, helps them through the stages of reaching an agreement, keeps the meeting moving, focuses discussion to the point-at hand; makes sure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and formulates and tests to see if consensus has been reached. Facilitators help to direct the process of the meeting, not its content. They never make decisions for the group. If a facilitator feels too emotionally involved in an issue or discussion and cannot remain neutral in behavior, if not in attitude, then s/he should ask someone to take over the task of facilitation for that agenda item.

2. For controversial decisions (optional) a vibe-watcher may be selected
A vibes-watcher is someone besides the facilitator who watches and comments on individual and group feelings and patterns of participation. Vibes-watchers need to be especially tuned in to the power dynamics of the group.

3. Secretary or Recorder will be selected on a rotating or volunteer basis

A recorder can take notes on the meeting, especially of decisions made and means of implementation.

4. Time-keeper will be selected on a rotating or volunteer basis –
 In order to keep things going on schedule so that each agenda item can be covered in the time allotted for it (if discussion runs over the time for an item, the group may or may not decide to contract for more time to finish up).

5. All participants in the decision-making process:
a) Come to the discussion with an open mind. This doesn't mean not thinking about the issue beforehand, but it does mean being willing to consider any other perspectives and ideas that come up in the discussion.

b) Listen to other people's ideas and try to understand their reasoning.

c) Describe your reasoning briefly so other people can understand you. Avoid arguing for your own judgments and trying to make other people change their minds to agree with you.

d) Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement and avoid conflict. Do not "go along" with decisions until you have resolved any reservations that you consider important.

e) View differences of opinion as helpful rather than harmful.

f) Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote. Stick with the process a little longer and see if you can't reach consensus after all.

Other:
Creation of a Speaker's list

The facilitator or recorder can keep a list of participants that want to comment on the decision at hand, in order of request

Agreement with a point of discussion

To avoid a lengthy meeting and repetition of points, participants can show approval or support of a speaker's point by an agreed upon hand signal or non-verbal cue.

This procedure was developed with the resources on the "Act Up" website.

Consensus Decision Making

In simple terms, consensus refers to agreement on some decision by all members of a group, rather than a majority or a select group of representatives. The consensus process is what a group goes through to reach this agreement. The assumptions, methods, and results are very different from traditional parliamentary procedure or majority voting methods.

Consensus is based on the belief that each person has some part of the truth and that no one has all of it (no matter how tempting it is to believe that we ourselves *really* know best!) It is also based on a respect for all persons involved in the decision being considered.

Acting according to consensus guidelines enables a group to take advantage of all group members' ideas. By combining their thoughts, people can often create a higher-quality decision than a vote decision or a decision by a single individual. Further, consensus decisions can be better than vote decisions because voting can actively undermine the decision. People are more likely to implement decisions they accept, and consensus makes acceptance more likely.

What the consensus process requires

Consensus demands a high level of trust among the members of the group. People need to believe that each member is a fair and reasonable person of integrity who has the organization's best interests at heart. There are no perfect groups or perfect individuals, but for consensus to work the members must believe that everyone is honestly doing their best.

Another important element of the consensus process is a good facilitator. This person is responsible for seeing that everyone is heard, that all ideas are incorporated if they seem to be part of the truth, and that the final decision is agreed upon by all assembled. The facilitator is the servant of the group, not its leader. It is his/her job to draw out and focus the best thinking of the group, not to use his/her position to impose or elevate his/her own.

It's important that the facilitator never show signs of impatience or disfavor towards an idea or a member. Total objectivity may an unattainable ideal, but the facilitator should strive to remain as neutral as possible in the discussion. If he/she can't manage this, then someone else should be facilitating. For this reason, many groups rotate the facilitator role on some kind of regular schedule, or choose a facilitator for each discussion depending on who is willing to forgo taking a more active part.

A good facilitator needs to be patient, intuitive, articulate, able to think on his/her feet, and have a sense of humor. He/she should always be on the lookout for things that are missing--a person who wants to speak but has been too shy, an idea that was badly articulated or dismissed too quickly but has potential, or anything happening on the nonverbal level that might be significant. The facilitator should periodically state and restate the ideas on the table, the elements that have been agreed on, and the questions still being decided. This allows everyone to see that progress is being made, and to focus on the work left to be done.

Variations on basic consensus

No matter how well the discussion is carried forward, how good the facilitator and how much integrity and trust exist in the group, there sometimes comes a point where all are in agreement but one or two. At this point there are a few possible courses of action. One is to ask if the individuals are willing to "step aside." This means that they do not agree with the decision but do not feel that it is wrong. They are willing to have the decision go forward, but do not want to take part in carrying it out.

Depending on the size and nature of the group, if more than one or two people want to step aside from a decision, the group should probably take another look at it. The facilitator might ask for a few minutes of silence to see if there is another decision or an amendment that should have been considered but has been overlooked, or something that would ease the situation.

Another possibility is to lay aside the issue for another time. Although this alternative may create some difficulties, the world will probably continue to turn with or without a decision being made right now. The need to make a decision promptly is often not as important as the need to ultimately come to unity around a decision that has been well-crafted, taking the time it needs to do it right.

A third possibility is that one or two people may stop the group from moving forward. At this time there are several key considerations. Most important, the group should see those who are withholding consensus as doing so out of their highest understanding and beliefs. Next, the individual(s) who are preventing the group from making the decision should also examine themselves closely to assure that they are not withholding consensus out of self-interest, bias, vengeance, or any other such feeling. A refusal to enter consensus should be based on a very strong belief that the decision is wrong--and that the dissenter(s) would be doing the group a great disservice by allowing the decision to go forward.

This is always one of those times when feelings can run high, and it's important for the group not to put pressure on those who differ. It's hard enough to feel that you are stopping the group from going forward, without feeling coerced to go against your examined reasons and deeply felt understandings.

Some groups operate under a modified consensus approach called "Consensus-Minus-One." What this means is that it takes more than one dissenting member to block consensus. One voice at odds with the rest is considered a workable way to go forward, but more than one is a sign that the decision should be re-thought. Consensus-Minus-One can be a reassuring arrangement for people who are new to the process of consensus decision-making, or in groups where members aren't well acquainted enough

to have the level of trust needed to commit to achieving full consensus. In practice, many groups have found that Consensus-Minus-One serves as a safety valve that rarely gets used. If even one member has strong reservations about a decision, it's often enough to keep the group searching for a better answer.

Some difficulties with consensus

1.   Achieving consensus can take considerably longer than a simple majority vote.

2.   People who don't actively try to find a decision that is acceptable to everyone (all-win) can dominate a group's discussion by trying to make everyone else go along with them (win-lose).

3.   A group can coerce or manipulate individuals into saying they accept a decision, even when they don't. That is groupthink, not true consensus.

Consensus and groupthink are different. Groupthink occurs when everyone expresses agreement with a decision, but some people are just going along because they feel obligated to reach an agreement and avoid conflict. Thus although there appears to be a consensus, some people have not resolved disagreements they consider important. In consensus, all agree with the decision and all important disagreements are resolved.

The time required to reach consensus can't usually be avoided. Instead, look at it as an investment in better decisions and a healthier, more egalitarian, more participatory organization.

The other pitfalls can best be dealt with through openness and continuous effort on everyone's part to do what is ethical and right for the group. A willingness to take risks and to give and receive honest feedback are key to developing the trust required to let the process work.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CONSENSUS-BASED DECISION MAKING

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WHAT IS CONSENSUS-BASED DECISION MAKING?

Consensus-based decision making is based on a *deliberate process of consensus building,* whereby members of a group actively participate in finding a decision together that all members can feel comfortable with.   A consensus decision does not necessarily reflect complete unanimity. However, decisions reached by consensus do reflect the thoughts and feelings of the group *as a whole[1]*, rather than just the majority. Effective consensus building results in decisions that have been thoughtfully deliberated, incorporate diverse experience and views, and may produce the best possible decision given the configuration of interests that have come together for a given purpose.

The advantage of consensus-based decisions as compared with majority rule voting is that it avoids a fundamental problem often associated with voting. Voting may unintentionally result in a split or division in a group, a satisfied majority and disgruntled minority, a sense of winners and losers. Moreover, in the interest of efficiency, there may be a propensity to rush to a vote without full deliberation when opinion seems to be going in a certain direction. The consensus-building process is based on thoughtful, respectful, fulsome deliberation and an intention to find the best possible decision that suits the group as a whole.

Consensus decision making is based on the premise that everyone's voice is worth hearing and that all concerns that come from a place of integrity are valid.   If a proposal is deeply troubling to even one person, that concern is respected; if it is ignored, the group is likely to make a mistake.   Various practical procedures and optional stances that group members can employ in navigating the sometimes unsettled waters of consensus-building are discussed in this document.

A group committed to consensus may utilize other forms of decision making (e.g., executive decision, majority rule) when appropriate; however, a group that has adopted a consensus model will use that process for items of strategic importance, related to core values, or around which there is a common perception that "the stakes are high."

WHEN TO USE THE CONSENSUS MODEL

Making decisions by consensus may be more or less appropriate depending in part on what's at stake with a given decision.

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[1] What makes a coherent group different than a mere collection of individuals? Complexity theory suggests that when individuals come together for a common purpose, under favorable conditions a qualitative "phase shift" may occur.   The whole becomes greater than the sum of parts.   This phenomenon is called "emergence."   A collection of individuals becomes a community, as problems are solved, work is accomplished, relationships deepen, common values are affirmed, trust builds, traditions develop, and a story is told. Community members are willing to set aside certain vested interests based on a more encompassing set of values or interests, without sacrificing their core values or individuality. This is neither "collectivism" (in which individuals unthinkingly surrender themselves) nor "individualism" (in which self-interest always remains the overriding consideration).

A full consensus-building process may be most appropriate for:

- Strategic[2] decisions
- High stakes decisions
- Decisions for which a strong, united front is important

A full consensus-building approach may be unnecessary or less appropriate for:
- Operational or tactical[3] decisions
- Decisions which have relatively minor impact and affect relatively few

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

Certain fundamental conditions need to be met in order to conduct an effective consensus-building process, including:

- Agreement on core values
- Willingness of members to both express interests as well as assume a "disinterested"[4] stance
- Willingness to make it work – belief in the value of consensus-building
- Active listening
- Sufficient time
- Patience
- Trust
- Succinct expression of views and concerns
- Skilled facilitation
- Conducive setting – properly bounded

A group intending to employ consensus-based decision making would do well to carefully consider the extent to which it can meet these conditions.   Most formal groups go through foundational exercises when forming, such as

WHAT CONSENSUS-BUILDING IS NOT:

Having worked as a Community Developer in various settings for more than 35 years, I have been part of many groups, teams, and organizations that have nominally adopted "consensus" as their decision-making procedure. Very often when a group decides to use a consensus model, there is little or no discussion of what that means, and little knowledge about how to conduct an effective consensus-building process.   What tends to happen in such cases is that the voices of the most assertive individuals or those with the most power (informal or formal) dominate and shape the discussion, often with many voices unheard, and without careful deliberation or full consideration of alternatives.   This is especially likely when organizations have full agendas and feel pressure to move quickly to get things done.   After brief discussion, a decision is proposed by the chair or other powerful member, who, after glancing around the room asks, "Do we have consensus then?" Showing little receptivity and giving scant time for alternatives to be voiced, "consensus" is quickly declared. At the other end of the continuum are groups that, though seeking to follow the true spirit of consensus, are rudderless and seem to get bogged down in endless conversation loops, rehashing the same material over and over, with little sense of progress or movement to a fruitful decision. This primer seeks to assist groups to avoid these of kinds of *pseudo-consensus* traps, and to practice more effective consensus-based decision making.

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[2] Strategic: of great importance within an integrated whole or to a planned effect.
[3] Tactical: of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose; made or carried out with only a limited or immediate end in view.
[4] Disinterested: Free from selfish motive or interest: unbiased. (See also comment in footnote [1].)

developing vision and mission statements, and undertaking exercises to build trust.   There are many resources readily available to assess a group's readiness along these lines, and to assist groups with such processes. When consensus-building breaks down, it usually points to an absence or shortage in one or more of these conditions.   Further comment with respect to some of these conditions is offered throughout this guide.

> ## THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A CONDUCIVE SETTING
>
> I have on occasion quipped after an unsatisfying meeting that community development training programs should include a required course solely devoted to how to arrange chairs for a meeting. The point is to highlight the importance of careful attention to conditions that are conducive to good group process.   Just the impact of the type of room and seating arrangement on group dynamics are often overlooked and underestimated. Seating should be arranged so that all participants can make good eye contact and readily hear one another. It is amazing to me how much this one factor affects meeting process. Long, narrow boardroom tables are not conducive.   Like good hosts at a dinner party, meeting conveners should welcome and encourage participants to connect informally as they begin to gather. Refreshments help. If participants aren't well known to one another, name tags are important, and newcomers should be introduced and warmly welcomed.   Extraneous distractions should be minimized so the group can focus.   Almost like a formal ceremony, the facilitator should signal a clear opening to the meeting, which includes welcome and introductions, an overview of the purpose/agenda, and in early stages at least, a reminder about process guidelines.   The idea is to deliberately create a "container" of dedicated time, space, and purpose, devoted to evoking the emergent process of consensus building.

Making decisions by consensus can be challenging.   It asks participants to be mindful and bring their best intentions to the process.   When a group begins to work together in this way it may feel awkward at first and take time to develop a group culture conducive to the process.   When it works well, it is a very satisfying and energizing process. As group members begin to experience the difference it can make in terms of creativity, quality, commitment to and enthusiasm for decisions and planned actions, it builds the confidence and strength of the group.

DEVELOPING PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Developing participation guidelines is a very useful exercise for any group to undertake when forming itself.   When a group collaboratively develops guidelines for how it wishes to conduct itself, intentionality and commitment to the group's efforts increases.   Here's a suggestion for how to conduct such a process.   Pose the following two scenarios, asking each group member to jot down their ideas individually. *1) Think of a group you have participated in, that you found to be especially dysfunctional or unproductive.   What were the factors that you think contributed to the dysfunction.   2) Think of a group you have participated in, that you found to be especially effective,*

productive, and satisfying to be part of.   What were the factors that you think contributed to its success?   Facilitate a group discussion, seeking to build consensus around a set of participation guidelines.   Revisit these guidelines regularly, especially when the group is about to undertake a challenging consensus-building process.

I have distilled the following participation guidelines from many years of experience.

In order for the group process to be:

- Enjoyable
- Constructive
- Productive
- Cooperative
- High Quality

Each member agrees to:

- Take responsibility for helping group achieve a positive outcome

- Listen very carefully to what others are saying

- Monitor his/her level of participation (neither dominate nor withhold)

- Be aware of the purpose, stay on topic

- Engage with, build on, respond to the ideas of others

- Express disagreement or concerns constructively and with respect

- Be aware of how both verbal and non-verbal signals impact group dynamics

- Avoid side conversations when we are conducting business in the group as a whole

- Be fully present, for example avoid unnecessary use of smart phones.

PROCEDURES FOR CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

Consensus-building does not follow a recipe. It is not a mechanical process – there is no algorithm to guide it.   It is a quintessentially *dialogical*, emergent human process that incorporates thought, feeling, knowledge, imagination, and lived experience. Nonetheless, it is a process that can be undertaken deliberately, mindfully, and whose broad contours can be mapped and navigated as follows.

1. <u>An issue will emerge</u>, in a meeting, from an agenda item, from a general discussion, or from a member. First, the people connected with the issue explain it. The facilitator ensures that the issue is stated in clear and positive terms.

2. <u>Those present discuss the issue</u>. The facilitator ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak and that the discussion stays focused on the issue at hand. (See *Comments on Facilitation* section.) Members express their thoughts and feelings honestly and succinctly; rather than repeating what has already been well-expressed, a member can simply indicate agreement with others.

3. <u>A common answer to the issue may emerge</u> during discussion with a self-evident decision presenting itself. The decision is stated in positive terms and the facilitator *canvasses each member* to see whether all questions and concerns have been satisfied to the point that all can agree. If so, consensus has been reached and is noted in the minutes (together with an indication of who will take what actions and when, if appropriate).

4. <u>If consensus is not reached, *a round* may be initiated</u> by the facilitator. In a round, each member in turn has an equal amount of time to comment on the issue, without interruption and without comments from the others (although questions may be asked for clarification only, when the person is finished).[5] When the round is over, the facilitator summarizes what was said and clarifies the current status of the issue.

5. Individual differences may have merged during the round into a common answer. If so, the <u>facilitator canvasses the group</u> for agreement and the consensus is noted in the minutes.

6. If consensus is still not achieved, a second round may be undertaken.

7. If consensus is still not achieved, the group has to decide:
   a. Whether progress is being made and further rounds may result in consensus, or
   b. Whether one or more of the necessary conditions for consensus are not currently being met and if so whether an adjustment can be made to accommodate, or
   c. If there is some fundamental split in the group, such as a divergence among some members around core values. The matter under contention would likely point to the value(s) in need of clarification.

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[5] In larger groups (e.g., more than 12 to 15), members need to be particularly disciplined and attentive to good group process. Members need to be as economical as possible in their comments, while still expressing what is essential in their view. Members are encouraged to simply indicate agreement if another member expresses well their view, or briefly qualify a viewpoint previously expressed. If issues arise that seem to require more deliberation, one option is to table the item, and charge a working group to go away and further deliberate and bring options back to the larger group.

THE POWER OF THE *ROUND*

A "round" (as described in the *Procedures* section) is a simple and amazingly powerful technique that, when utilized at an appropriate moment, can help open-up and move along a discussion that has bogged down, or seems to be bouncing around between just a few of the more assertive members of the group. It is especially useful for bringing into the discussion the perspectives of more introverted group members. Whereas more extraverted individuals develop their ideas and get energized by "thinking out loud," introverts work their ideas through on the inside.   Their thorough internal processing often results in more fully formed, richly nuanced perspectives. Introverts tend to need to have some space deliberately opened up for their views to be expressed in the group discussion.   More introverted participants can be encouraged to assert themselves and extraverted members reminded to contain themselves as part of the general process guidelines, but it is also incumbent upon the facilitator to be attentive to this dynamic.   This is not to disparage extraverts.   Both energies are needed, but without deliberate attention to this dynamic, extraverts tend to dominant, and introverts' contributions are often lost.   I have found that deliberately slowing things down and making space for quieter voices by using a "round" has introduced the new idea or creative element that breaks the logjam, synthesizes divergent threads of the discussion, and reconciles apparent contradictions.

OPTIONAL STANCES MEMBERS CAN TAKE

A critical ingredient for success in consensus decision making is the conscious intention of members to participate in a spirit of consensus building.   This process is greatly facilitated when members keep in mind and deliberately express themselves in terms of the following optional stances.

Expression of concern: Rather than taking a hard-and-fast negative position, members express their concerns and the reasons for them. This allows room for proposals to be modified to meet the concerns.

Reservations: After fulsome deliberation, one or more members may find a concern has not been satisfactorily addressed, but that they consider that concern relatively minor.   The member(s) would then indicate that they have reservations. They might say "I still have some unresolved concerns; I have reservations but I can live with it."

Non-support or standing aside: This stance allows a member to be clear that they do not agree with or support the proposed decision, without leaving or blocking the group from proceeding. The member might say, "I personally don't support this, but I won't stop others from doing it." The member explicitly states that they are *standing aside* and this is noted in the minutes.   If two or more members stand aside, perhaps additional work is required to conceive a more mutual solution.

Blocking or withdrawing from the group: Blocking means "I cannot support this or allow the group to support this. I perceive it to be in contradiction of our core values and/or unethical or immoral." Blocking can only be used very rarely without threatening the viability of the group. It should be a last resort.   For blocking to be a viable option, an individual taking such a stand must be very clear, operating from deep conviction, and enjoy the trust and respect of the group.   An individual may decide they do not feel justified in blocking the group, but neither can they continue to be a member based on the direction the group has taken.

If consensus breaks down: If several people express non-support, stand aside or leave the group, it may not be a viable decision even if no one directly blocks it.   Some groups decide to take "blocking" as an optional stance off the table, and instead opt for a steep super-majority decision rule, such as two-thirds or three-quarters majority, in the event the consensus process seems to have become intractable.   Some practitioners of consensus-building argue that to allow this option negates the spirit of consensus.   In some situations (e.g., a group or team operating within a hierarchical organizational structure), failure to achieve consensus may result in the decision-making authority defaulting to a "higher authority."   Either way, the group needs to decide what they will do if it is unable to achieve consensus. It must be emphasized however, that if the necessary conditions are met, and procedures described in this guide are followed, the prospects for success are very good!

COMMENTS ON FACILITATION

The role of facilitator is very important in consensus-based decision making. Facilitation is a learned skill that can be cultivated with practice, though some people seem to have a knack for it. Personal characteristics of good facilitators may include: experienced with group process, strong intuition, sensitivity and empathy, ability to summarize and synthesize elements of the discussion in clear and succinct terms, humour, and appropriate assertiveness.

The group may have among its membership, and choose to call on to serve the group, someone who is a highly skilled facilitator. If a number of members are skilled facilitators, or if the group wants to assist members to cultivate facilitation skills, it may want to experiment with co-facilitation or rotating the role.

The Role of Facilitator:

- Create a safe and conducive environment for group process – physical space, opening the meeting, providing context, setting tone, establishing participation guidelines.

- Use the agenda to frame discussion points, manage time and help group achieve the meeting's objectives.

- Facilitate the process without unduly influencing the content of the discussion.

- Moderate the discussion as necessary with the "right touch" to ensure everyone has a fair opportunity to participate.
  - Use a "lighter touch" in earlier or emerging phases of a discussion
  - Use more assertive interventions as discussion gets more energetic

- Track and periodically articulate the terms of the discussion as it evolves, seeking validation from the group that the issue is being framed accurately.

- Notice and articulate for the group at opportune moments, points of convergence and divergence in the ongoing group deliberation.

- Stay aware of and remind the group if necessary about consensus procedures, optional stances members may take, and participation guidelines.

- Make appropriate use of the "round" or other instant feedback techniques[6] as a means of getting a reading on the developing sense of the group.

- Keep the meeting focused and moving at an appropriate pace –
  - Use intuition, pay attention to the energy associated with a discussion point.
  - Make group aware of time, check in to determine whether to continue on a point, table it for later discussion, or move on.

- Reinforce and support both "expression of concerns" and efforts by members to accommodate concerns through propositions that incorporate and synthesize divergent threads.

- Articulate and test for elements of consensus as it begins to emerge.

- If necessary, conduct one or more "rounds," reminding members to speak economically while encouraging them to express all views relevant and essential to the decision.

- At the decision point, summarize the discussion, formulate the consensus statement in positive terms, and test for consensus.

- If the facilitator feels too emotionally involved in a particular discussion and has difficulty remaining neutral, s/he should ask someone to take over the task of facilitation for that agenda item. (Any group member may suggest that the facilitator consider yielding the chair for a particular discussion or decision point if the facilitator is perceived to be too personally invested in the outcome.)

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[6] For example, ask participants to indicate how they are leaning on a question using by show of hands for pro, con, or noncommittal; thumbs up/down; "clicker" polling technology, etc.

CONCLUSION

In this guide I have tried to offer practical suggestions as well as some more philosophical reflections on the process of consensus-based decision making, based on 35 years experience as a Community Developer.

Whereas a full, formal, consensus-based decision making process is not always necessary or appropriate, the spirit underlying consensus building can be brought by any individual to any group process.   In my experience, these attitudes, skills, and stances applied in virtually any setting tends to help a group move in a more creative, inclusive, and healthful direction.

Please direct any comments or feedback on this guide to j.madden@sympatico.ca .