A Checklist for the Consensus Process

These are just some of the many ways to conduct a meeting using the consensus process. Roles should be carried out by everyone as needed — not just the person specially designated.

**Basic Procedure**

**Before the meeting (or at previous meeting):**
- Choose facilitator(s)
- Gather agenda items
- Determine presenter/initiator for each item
- Determine item type: announcement, report, discussion, decision
- Bring materials/supplies needed

**At the meeting:**
- Connect (game, song, ritual, etc.)
- Check-in/excitement-sharing
- Agenda review: agree on order and time
- Choose notetaker, timekeeper, vibeswatcher
- Step through the agenda
- Set next meeting
- Evaluation (good, bad, better)
- Closing (game, song, ritual, etc.)

**Typical Tasks of Facilitator(s)**
- Helps formulate agenda
- Helps establish a hopeful, upbeat, and safe atmosphere
- Helps group work through decisions:
  - Asks for clarification
  - Summarizes and sorts discussion — lists threads of thought, agreements, and disagreements
  - Helps focus and order discussion topics
  - Brings out all viewpoints
  - Restates final decisions
- Encourages equal participation
- Draws out quiet people
- Asks windy speakers to be brief
- Encourages everyone to perform leadership tasks
- Calls on speakers
- Stays neutral while facilitating

**Typical Tasks of a Vibeswatcher (“Caretaker”)**
- Watches the process of the meeting
- Notices underlying feelings from tone of voice and body language, points out tension and weariness, recommends changes
- Stops bad process (domineering, guilt-tripping, interrupting, put-downs, bulldozing, defensiveness, space-outs, etc.)
- Helps resolve conflicts
- Helps work out negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, hopelessness)
- Suggests tools to improve meetings
- Helps create a safe, accepting tone
- Deals with outside distractions

**Stress-Reduction Techniques**
- Stretch breaks/cooperative games
- Singing
- Humor
- Affirmations
- Feelings sharing
- Silence (meditation, prayer)
- Calm voice
- Eye contact
- Breathing (deep)
- Back rubs

**Conflict Resolution Tools**
- Appreciations/affirmations
- Active listening
- I-messages
- Restating other’s viewpoint
- Six-step problem solving technique
- Support groups
- Venting emotions somewhere else
- Gripe sessions
- Resentment sharing
- Fishbowls

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**The Flow of a Cooperative Decision-Making Process**

Issue raised — what is the problem?
- Clarify problem — put it in context
- Discuss, bring out a diversity of ideas, concerns, and perspectives — look at possible solutions and the problems with those solutions
- Encourage heartfelt dissent and challenge
- Note agreements and disagreements and the underlying reasons for them — discuss those underlying reasons
- Synthesize proposed ideas/solutions or come up with totally new ideas in the supportive atmosphere of the meeting (find a “third way”)
- Evaluate the different ideas until one idea seems right for the group
- Establish how the decision will be implemented
- Make sure there are no loose ends
- Restate the decision for the notetaker (including implementation)

**Discussion/Problem-Solving Tools**
- Brainstorms
- Go around the circle
- Small-group discussion (3-7 people)
- Advantages/disadvantages chart
- Visual aids
- Visible notes
- Goals-/priorities-setting techniques
- Challenges/devil’s advocate questions

**Process/Empowerment Tools**
- Participation equalizers (pebbles, etc.)
- Active listening in pairs
- Support groups/caucuses
- Feelings sharing
- Fishbowls
- Role plays

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