



Consensus and the Gradations of Agreement Scale

University Unitarian Church

Consensus is an alternative to voting as a democratic means of making decisions. It allows for more nuanced understanding of how people think and feel. It can result in more solid decisions, because it requires that everyone *be able to support the decision* – while in voting, members of the “losing” side may or may not feel they can support the outcome.

1. Have discussion.
2. Call for closure of discussion, and put forward a proposed decision.
3. Have everyone state where they place themselves on the scale, and a brief statement of why. No group discussion.
4. After polling is complete, look at the results. Possible options:

Enthusiastic Support

Everybody picks 1 or 2.

If there's Enthusiastic Support, you are done!

Blocked Decision

- Anybody picks 5 (Serious Disagreement)

OR

- more than X people pick 3 or 4

If there's a Blocked Decision, there is more discussion about what information or action steps might help the group move to greater consensus. After discussion, *the person in charge* decides what next action steps will happen. The person in charge can ask for whatever kind of approval/support from the group that s/he feels they need.

Qualified Support

- most (but not all) people pick 1-2

AND

- no one picks 5 (Serious Disagreement)

If there is Qualified Support:

- *The person in charge* can decide whether the Qualified Support decision holds, or if there will be more discussion or action steps.
 - The group can create some *standing rules* for how to handle Qualified Support.
-

Variations/options:

- Some options for switching from consensus to majority vote:
 - Vote-to-vote: At any point, the group can switch to majority vote if 80% of participants want to do so.
 - Triggered vote: If no decision has been made after three rounds of discussion and polling, the group automatically switches to majority vote.
- Some options for the “person in charge” role:
 - Formal chair or co-chairs
 - All members take turns
 - Key members take turns
 - Most invested stakeholder in the conversation takes the role
- Some options for ending discussion:
 - Vote on when to end discussion
 - Person-in-charge decides when to end discussion
 - One person calls for cloture and at least two people must agree

Gradients of Agreement Scale (short)

