MEETING FACILITATION

Based on training by Caroline Estes and information from Margot Helphand
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Process types
Robert’s Rules, implied consensus, formal consensus

Consensus decision-making
old tradition - native tribes - Friends meeting formalized 300 yrs ago as
“God in everyone” and “sense of the meeting”
secular version “everyone has a piece of the truth”
- not same as general agreement, is process, not product
- consensus = unity (can live with decision), not uniformity nor unanimity

UO is usually one or two, not three, but there are exceptions

Importance of externalizing process before conflict erupts.
Difficulty of switching to consensus process in a conflicted group.
Challenges of very large or very small numbers.

In Robert’s Rules, role of chair, interaction with role of facilitator

In implied or formal consensus, roles of
presenter(s), if used
facilitator
note-taker (visible)
time-keeper
back-up facilitator
participant
observer

Facilitator’s loyalty to process, not specific outcome
thus important to not speculate on or predict results

Meeting prep
Meeting time set by egalitarian method (e.g. not by those attending) that ensures
participation by key participants
Meeting location convenient to participants, as appropriate (as opposed to planners)
Agenda 24 hours ahead, possible agenda-setting meeting of leadership
Facilitator arrival to set up 15 to 30 minutes ahead
Writing surface for visible notes: flip chart & tape, or chalk board, or ??
Provide air
Provide daylight and views
Provide comfortable chairs
Consider food and drink

GROUND RULES FOR ALL MEETINGS
Written, preferably visible agenda, preferably with times
start with light/quick items to build momentum and sense of completion
if meeting more than 90 minutes, no more than 60 minutes without break
Visible notes
Start on time, end on time (or agree to extend), switch to time discussion when down to 10 or 15 minutes.
Closing statement, evaluation, act, or song (soooo Eugene, hold hands and sing Kumbaya)
Distribute very abbreviated summary (about one page max) within 48 hours

CONSENSUS
Three possible positions in a consensus process:
- consensus
- standing aside
- blocking
  = feels that for the good of the group, a serious mistake is being made
- requires blocker to express concern during discussion/process
- requires blocker to take responsibility for finding consensus for alt.
- 6 in a lifetime is more than enough; must be fundamental
- if simply a difference of values, should stand aside instead
- if one individual blocks repeatedly, probably they’re in wrong mtg.

Consensus process values
  democracy
  cooperation
  egalitarianism
  responsible for actions (e.g. no snide remarks)

Process order
  presentation of proposal (or issue, or question, but best proposal), best written
  use of [true] brainstorming, and double bell curve of discussion
    facilitator may control flow, esp. in larger groups
    train people to say simply “I agree with so-and-so”, not easy w/ academs
    round-the-table (or circle) vs. popcorn vs. popcorn no repeat
    round is very time consuming
    “call-on” variant on popcorn as technique to get diverse opinions
    facilitator may need to cut off the most talkative or the direct responders
    if someone is interrupted, facilitator interups and gives floor back to 1st.
    monitor the non-dominants, eye contact, watch hands
    facilitator stays out of discussion, or must step out, at least in part
      (back-up?)
    watch out for weak side (based on right-eyed vs. left eyed)
    if issue is “iceberg”, early intervention to create committee or defer
    finding consensus
      facilitator has sense of possible consensus during discussion
        or states possible lack of
        listing (writing) areas of visible consensus as they develop
    testing with straw poll, thumbs up/sideways/down or five fingers

IMPLIED CONSENSUS
Implied consensus is like above without explicit statements at beginning about process
nor near end about consensus.
ROBERTS RULES
Many consensus techniques apply, but ask for vote instead of asking for consensus. Don’t forget to ask for pros, cons, and abstentions.