

Corporation for National & Community Service  
Montana State Office

## IN-SERVICE TRAINING








Learning Circle D:

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## MAKING DECISIONS COLLABORATIVELY

## LC: MAKING DECISIONS COLLABORATIVELY LEARNING OUTCOMES

*As a result of this session, participants will be able to:*

	Identify the key characteristics of the collaborative decision-making process.
	Recognize situations in which collaborative decision-making strategies will be effective.
	Understand the factors that can slow down or speed up the collaborative decision-making process.
	Carry forward the collaborative decision-making process in their community.
	Discuss the importance of decision-making processes and patterns within communities and how it relates to community-based work.



## PROPOSED AGENDA:

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### 1. Learning Circle Set-Up

- ✓ Welcome, introductions
- ✓ Session overview, packet, working agreements

### 2. Collaborative Decision-Making Basics

- ✓ Decision making in a community context
- ✓ Key Characteristics of CDM
- ✓ CDM models
- ✓ Inclusive decision making– who should be at the table?

### 3. Decision Making Lab: In The “Real World”

- ✓ Barriers to inclusiveness
- ✓ Receiving input from community
- ✓ Influencing the decision makers
- ✓ Strategies that work
- ✓ Creating opportunities for inclusion

### 4. Learning Circle Close-Out

- ✓ Summary of session, reflection
- ✓ Closing remarks



## DECISION MAKING IN A COMMUNITY CONTEXT

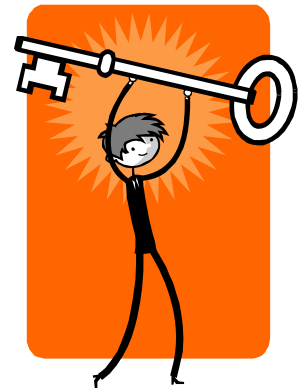
What is collaborative decision-making? How does the way in which decisions are made impact our work in the community? How can we know we are being effective facilitators of change when it comes to decision-making structures and models? When and how is it appropriate to guide the process of decision-making?

In a community-based scenario, there are many people involved in making a decision and dealing with the consequences of the decision.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

The “best decision” is described as a decision that:

- ✓ would not have been thought of by an individual alone
- ✓ is a sound solution to the problem
- ✓ is a decision based upon input, as unbiased as possible, from each team member
- ✓ addresses the team’s goal for the decision-making process





## COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING IS:

- ✓ Inclusive
  - ✓ Thorough
  - ✓ Time-consuming
  - ✓ A process requiring buy in from many stakeholders
  - ✓ Frustrating
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- ✓ Rewarding
  - ✓ Beneficial to cooperation
  - ✓ A way to prevent conflict
  - ✓ A process that can breed conflict
  - ✓ Finding the best possible solution that everyone can live with

## COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING IS NOT:

- ✓ Random
- ✓ Exclusive
- ✓ Quick
- ✓ Involving few stakeholders
- ✓ Without structure and goals
- ✓ Making assumptions about what the community would want
- ✓ A process that ignores or doesn't collect input and feedback



## DECISION-MAKING MODELS



### **Method 1. Decision made by authority without group discussion**

Process: The designated leader makes all decisions without consulting group members.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes minimal time to make decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No group interaction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonly used in organizations (so we are familiar with method)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team may not understand decision or be unable to implement decision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High on assertiveness scale (see <a href="#">conflict paper</a>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low on cooperation scale (see <a href="#">conflict paper</a>)</li> </ul>

#### **Appropriate Times for Method 1**

- Simple, routine, administrative decisions; little time available to make decision; team commitment required to implement the decision is low.

### **Method 2. Decision by expert**

Process: Select the expert from group, let the expert consider the issues, and let the expert make decisions.



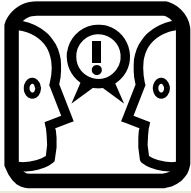
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful when one person on the team has overwhelming expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear how to determine who the expert is (team members may have different opinions)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No group interaction</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May become popularity issue or power issue</li> </ul>

#### **Appropriate Times for Method 2**

- Result is highly dependent on specific expertise, clear choice for expert, team commitment required to implement decision is low.

## DECISION-MAKING MODELS (CONT.)

### **Method 3. Decision by averaging individuals' opinions**



Process: Separately ask each team member his/her opinion and average the results.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme opinions cancelled out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No group interaction, team members are not truly involved in the decision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Error typically cancelled out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opinions of least and most knowledgeable members may cancel</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group members consulted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to decision may not be strong</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful when it is difficult to get the team together to talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unresolved conflict may exist or escalate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent decisions can be made</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May damage future team effectiveness</li> </ul>

#### **Appropriate Times for Method 3**

- Time available for decision is limited; team participation is required, but lengthy interaction is undesirable; team commitment required to implement the decision is low.

### **Method 4. Decision made by authority after group discussion**

Process: The team creates ideas and has discussions, but the designated leader makes the final decision. The designated leader calls a meeting, presents the issue, listens to discussion from the team, and announces her/his decision.

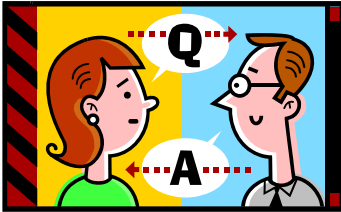


Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team used more than methods 1–3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team is not part of decision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to the team increases the accuracy of the decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team may compete for the leader's attention</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team members may tell leader "what he/she wants to hear"</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still may not have commitment from the team to the decision</li> </ul>

## DECISION-MAKING MODELS (CONT.)

### *Appropriate Times for Method 4*

- Available time allows team interaction but not agreement; clear consensus on authority; team commitment required to implement decision is moderately low.



### **Method 5. Decision by minority**

Process: A minority of the team, two or more members who constitute less than 50% of the team, make the team's decision

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method often used by executive committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be railroading</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method can be used by temporary committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not have full team commitment to decision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful for large number of decisions and limited time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May create an air of competition among team members</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some team perspective and discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still may not have commitment from team to decision</li> </ul>

### *Appropriate Times for Method 5*

- Limited time prevents convening entire team; clear choice of minority group; team commitment required to implement the decision is moderately low.

### **Method 6. Decision by majority vote**

Process: This is the most commonly used method in the United States (not synonymous with best method). Discuss the decision until 51% or more of the team members make the decision.



Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful when there is insufficient time to make decision by consensus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taken for granted as the natural, or only, way for teams to make a decision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful when the complete team-member commitment is unnecessary for implementing a decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team is viewed as the “winners and the losers”; reduces the quality of decision</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minority opinion not discussed and may not be valued</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have unresolved and unaddressed conflict</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full group interaction is not obtained</li> </ul>



### Appropriate Times for Method 6

- Time constraints require decision; group consensus supporting voting process; team commitment required to implement decision is moderately high.



### Method 7. Decision by consensus

Process: Collective decision arrived at through an effective and fair communication process (all team members spoke and listened, and all were valued).

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most effective method of team decision making</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes more time than methods 1–6</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All team members express their thoughts and feelings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes psychological energy and high degree of team-member skill (can be negative if individual team members not committed to the process)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Team members “feel understood”</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active listening used (see <a href="#">communication paper</a>)</li></ul>	

### Appropriate Times for Method 7

- Time available allows a consensus to be reached; the team is sufficiently skilled to reach a consensus; the team commitment required to implement the decision is high.

*From Johnson and Johnson, 2000*

# EXPERIENCING COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING



<b>Decision-Making Process:</b>			
Decision Maker(s) are:			
Input gathered from:			
Concerns:			
Support:			
Decision:			
Level of cooperation:	High	Medium	Low



# CHALLENGES

Even when we try to be inclusive, sometimes we run into challenges that are difficult to understand. Why doesn't everyone involved want to include more people and more diverse viewpoints?

## POWER DYNAMICS:

- People in supervisory positions often have last word and veto power
- Collaboration can sometimes threaten established hierarchy
- Understand your organizational culture and decision-making structures



**How would a collaborative process benefit those in positions of authority at my site?**

## HISTORY:

- The organization has its own background and history, which may include negative experiences with collaboration before
  - Understand how power came to be distributed and why
  - Understand what may have gone wrong before to show stakeholders how mistakes will not be repeated

**What historical factors affect collaboration at my site?**

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES:

- People from different cultures and backgrounds approach decision making differently
- Not everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves in the same environment
- Unwillingness to give input due to an unsafe environment can sometimes be construed as not caring about outcomes.



**How is input solicited at my site so that everyone feels safe and comfortable to express opinions and feelings?**

## EXTERNAL FACTORS:

- Expectations or influence from other groups (community partners or rivals) or individuals (like large donors) can change the way decisions are approached
- Funding – lack of or abundance of – can influence power structures
- Community support and perception also influences decisions

**What external factors are impacting collaboration at my site?**

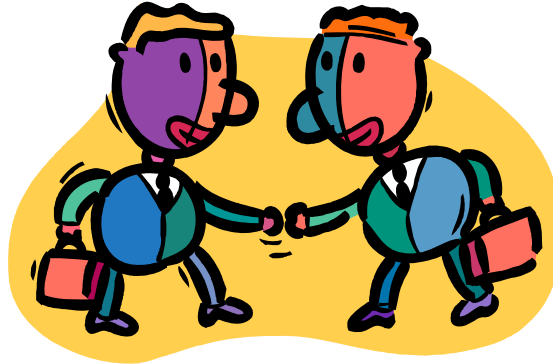
# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS!



In your small groups, revisit your earlier decision-making process. What worked? What caused conflict? What left the group dissatisfied with the decision?

What needed to be changed?	How will you change it?

# RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING



In your small group, brainstorm real-life decisions where collaborative decision making would enhance the outcome.

**Collaborative decision making is appropriate when...**

In your small group, brainstorm real-life decisions where collaborative decision making would endanger the outcome:

**Collaborative decision making is not appropriate when...**



## SUSTAINING THE COLLABORATION

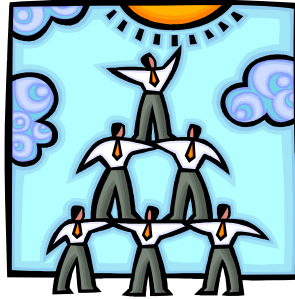
*OK – now your community is on track and utilizing a method of collaborative decision making to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders. How do you keep that momentum going in a direction that brings success?*

**In order to sustain the collaboration, are the following conditions true?**

- All participants understand their purpose, roles, and responsibilities clearly
- Transparency of decision making: Process is discussed, understood, and agreed upon before beginning
- Interest-based decision making: decision making structure reflects the goals of the interested parties
- Every effort is made to bring affected stakeholders into the process
- Stakeholders should represent organized constituencies rather than as individual citizens
- There is a thorough exploration of interests, concerns and needs of stakeholders at the start of the process
- Time and resources are devoted to developing a common information base among stakeholders
- Policy and technical expertise are brought in whenever necessary to provide support
- The process is managed so that all are heard and respected
- Transparency of products: decisions made or documents produced are accessible to all stakeholders as well as other interested parties
- There should be resources and time allotted to the process.

*From “Conditions Needed to Sustain a Collaborative Policy Process,” Center for Collaborative Policy, California State University – Sacramento,  
<http://www.csus.edu/ccp/collaborative/sustain.htm>*

# CARRY IT FORWARD...



*One of the most important parts of community work is sharing what you've learned with other stakeholders at your site. Engage in some individual reflection about who needs to know about collaborative decision-making processes at your site:*

**The five community stakeholders who should know about this are:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**After I share this information with my community, my next steps are to:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



## Bibliography and Resources

### Useful Websites:

<http://www.community-problem-solving.net/> - Resource from M.I.T.

<http://www.csus.edu/ccp/links.htm> - California State University, Sacramento, Center for Collaborative Policy

<http://pathwaystooutcomes.org/> - Pathways to Outcomes Mapping Initiative, Project on Effective Interventions, Harvard University

<http://ctb.ku.edu> – University of Kansas Community Tool Box

*“Conditions Needed to Sustain a Collaborative Policy Process,”* Center for Collaborative Policy, California State University – Sacramento,

<http://www.csus.edu/ccp/collaborative/sustain.htm>.

Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, F.P. (2000). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills*, 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.