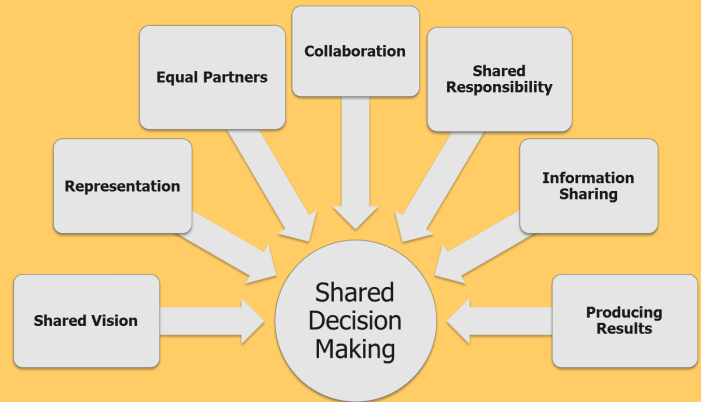# Processes Groups Use

What are the principles that guide group processes?

As a member of a decision-making group, it is important to be aware of the following principles and to see if they are happening in your group.

PRINCIPLE 1 - Shared Vision
Groups need to *find common ground.* Once a group finds agreement on how they see a better future, their work will be more effective. This is what is called "shared vision."

PRINCIPLE 2 - Representation
Often, a group has to make decisions that affect a large number of people. When making decisions, groups must *consider the needs and perspectives of all people who are affected*. Views from professionals, family members, and students of all backgrounds must be heard and considered by everyone in the group.

PRINCIPLE 3 - Equal Partners
Each member of the group must share power and have time to speak. While groups often have leaders that help organize the group, *each member must be treated equally.* Each member's input is valuable.

PRINCIPLE 4 - Collaboration
Shared decision-making requires that people from different backgrounds have *opportunities to work together*. Members may not always agree, but they should strive to trust each other, listen to each other, and respect each other's opinions and views. It takes time and experiences together to build trust.

PRINCIPLE 5 - Shared Responsibility
Groups who are most effective follow through on tasks and learn to re-visit their decisions to make sure they are still working. Families, professionals and the broad community all need to *agree to do their part in improving outcomes for children.* This is what we mean by "shared-responsibility."

PRINCIPLE 6 - Information Sharing
Accurate, understandable, and complete information is needed by all members in order to make the best, well-informed decisions. All members benefit from *staying up-to-date* on national, state and local rules, regulations, and policies regarding an issue.

PRINCIPLE 7 - Producing Results
Groups may go step by step through an agreed upon process with the intention of reaching their goal. At points along the way, *groups need to check their progress* to see if they are staying on track and how close they are to reaching their goal.

If one of these principles is missing, the outcomes will be impacted and shared decision-making will be compromised.

Processes Groups Use

What are processes groups use?

The most effective groups use processes to guide their work. These processes may be new to you. In this section, we will explain some common processes that groups might use.

Starting with the end in mind

Outcomes are defined as the changes a group wants to see that are most likely to produce long-term results. Groups may begin their work together by defining what positive outcomes they would consider acceptable from their efforts together. On-going data collection becomes an essential way to measure progress toward the outcomes they want to see.

Working toward positive results

Groups must ask themselves if the decisions they made resulted in the outcome they had hoped for. If so **celebrate** and **publicize the success**! If not, then they will need to go back to the decision-making processes and make adjustments until they have a plan that is producing positive results.

Common decision-making processes groups might use are:

1. Information Gathering
2. Goal Setting
3. Planning
4. Collaboration
5. Evaluation
6. Processes for Reaching Agreement

Families Ask Questions

I don't understand the decision-making model our group is using. What can I do to make the data and the process make more sense?

"*Ask for examples and take notes that reword the answers so that it makes sense to you later on when you read it again. If possible ask for a written explanation of the process and the data so you can revisit and study the information in private.*"
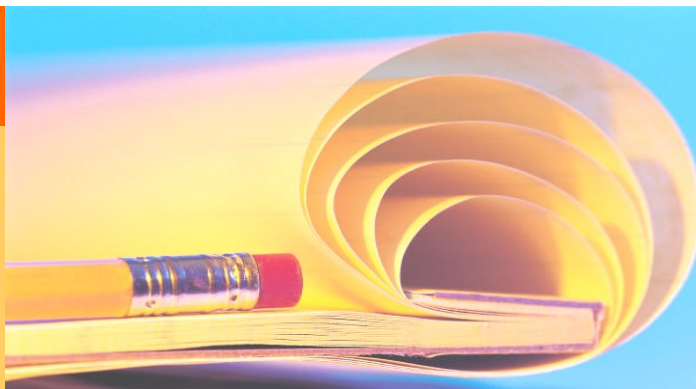
-Une-Ta, parent

"*Find an ally and ask them…someone you have a trusting relationship with. Ask to speak privately about the questions you have.*"

-Kara, parent

Processes Groups Use

1. Information Gathering Processes

It is important for groups to use accurate information or *data*. It can be numbers, facts, opinions, ideas, or stories.

Information comes in many forms and can be collected in many ways. *Brainstorming* is a strategy facilitators use when groups want to generate and collect lots of ideas. The information gathering process may be as simple as asking two or three questions that a *focus group* (a group of experts) will answer together.

Issues may be identified in the information gathering process that will need to be addressed. Priority may be given to issues that are the most important or that may take the most time to accomplish. *Short term goals* and *long term goals* are set after a group sets their priorities.

2. Goal Setting Processes

Goals, or what a group wants to see happen, need to be stated up front so the group knows what they are working towards. The group's *vision* and *mission* are helpful tools to guide goal setting.

A *vision statement* describes the changes the group wants to see happen in the future as a result of their actions. It is the group's dream for the future.

A *mission statement* provides direction, and sets the goals, actions and decision-making processes of the group. It is what the group is currently doing.

S.M.A.R.T. Goals are written as one way to help the group accomplish what they set out to do and are described as:

Specific– What are you going to do?
Measurable– How are you going to do it?
Attainable– Can you commit to doing it?
Realistic– Is it doable?
Timely– What is your timeframe?

3. Planning Processes

A *plan* begins to form when the team agrees on the first steps and how much to work on at a time. Sometimes called an *action plan*, the plan should include who will do what, by when, and in what order.

Tools to use in the planning process:

- *Logic models* are diagrams that illustrate how a group's activities connect to the group's goals and outcomes.

- *Schedules* provide the group with assignments to accomplish within agreed upon deadlines.

Processes Groups Use

Remember...
A clear process sets the direction and guides the actions of a group toward their goals.

4. Collaboration Processes

When members of a group voluntarily bring their knowledge and experiences together to work toward a common goal, we call this *collaboration*.

Tools groups use to encourage collaboration are:

- *Agreed upon expectations* for cooperation and a positive working environment.

- A *neutral facilitator* to help with group dynamics, especially if the members of the group have not worked together before.

- *On-going communication* and *networking* so no one feels left out and relationships are built and maintained.

- *Meaningful activities* for all members so they all feel like they are contributing to the group's work.

- *Focused training* and *technical assistance* to support the group's members to work more effectively.

When collaboration processes are used, the benefits groups see include:

- more involvement
- better communication
- better relationships
- greater commitment

Words of Wisdom

Even if the group has not found a process, you can! All good processes are really just a plan for staying organized, taking action, and planning for the next steps.

Here are tips that may help you personally be effective:

- **Organize your information** so you see what is missing and you know where to easily find items.

- **Keep the group's goals in mind** when doing your work.

- **List priorities** so you stay focused on them.

- **Keep an open mind** and **encourage dialogue** to understand the differing viewpoints.

- **Ask the leader** to explain member roles so you know how you can be most helpful.

- **Take notes** on what the next steps are so you will be able to take action.

- **Write down the results** of your activities so you see where progress has been made.

Processes Groups Use

Tip:
Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when a discussion stands still. Instead, look for the next best choice for everyone.
Try to think outside the box.

5. Evaluation Processes

After a group has begun collaborating on their action plan and they have been working together for awhile, they need to revisit that plan to see if it is resulting in what they had hoped for.

It may be necessary for the group to collect more information. When new information is compared to previous information you already have, we call this **evaluation**.

Built within the overall action plan, there should be a statement for how evaluation data is collected and shared with the team and others as the work progresses. This evaluation data will provide good information to make it possible to "tweak" the plan as necessary. This is called a **formative evaluation**.

At the end of the work from the action plan, the group meets to look at what has been accomplished. They evaluate the efforts that have been made and decide if they were on the right path. They consider what else could have been done and talk about what they have discovered. This is called a **summative evaluation**.

6. Processes for Reaching Agreement

Parliamentary procedure may be used by groups to establish a process for managing discussions and reaching agreement.

Voting is the most formal process groups use to create agreement. **Robert's Rules of Order** is a tool that provides a structure for this process.

Another way groups create agreement is through a **consensus building process**. Even though it is less formal than voting, it can be complicated. This is because it requires that members of the group buy into, or believe in, an idea before they will agree to it. The discussion continues until all members of the group agree.

In true consensus, the key is compromise. Consensus does not always guarantee that everyone believes the result is perfect, but rather that everyone can live with their decision. It does have one advantage. It has the potential to strengthen group relationships.

Processes Groups Use

Using Robert's Rules of Order

Some groups are very formal and follow rules for reaching agreement. *Robert's Rules of Order* is a tool that provides a set of rules to bring up and vote on issues. Meeting minutes document the steps.

Making and Passing Motions

1. A member makes a motion such as, "I move that…(then states the proposal)."

2. Another member seconds the motion by saying, "I second the motion." You do not have to be in favor of the motion to second it. By seconding the motion you just allow discussion to take place. Without a 'second', all action on the motion dies.

3. The chair, or group leader, may repeat the motion so that everyone is clear about what proposal they are voting on.

4. The chair asks for discussion on the motion. The chair will try to make sure everyone has an opportunity to discuss the motion. If someone tends to dominate the discussion, the chair can set up a rule that gives others a chance to participate. For example, members are only allowed to speak twice on an issue. The chair will set the order for speaking.

Rules for Discussing a Motion

1. Keep comments relevant to the motion that is "on the table" (being discussed). Avoid personal attacks and remain courteous in your comments.

2. You can amend your own or someone else's motion by adding and removing words or paragraphs or by substituting whole new sections into the motion.

If a motion is amended, the chair will ask members to vote on whether they accept the amendment.

Voting on a Motion

The chair asks members to vote on the motion and says, "We are now voting on the motion to… (restates the original or an amended version of the proposal)…All those in favor raise your hand or say "Yea" (meaning "yes") and all those opposed raise your hand and say "nay" (meaning 'no'). If you are confused by what you are voting on, ask the chair for clarification. You may also abstain and not vote on a motion. All votes, including abstentions, should be reflected in the minutes. You should only abstain if you have a conflict of interest or another reason other than being undecided.

Passage of a Motion

A majority of members must vote in favor for a motion to pass. If there is a tie, and the chair has voting rights, the chair can break the tie. In cases where the chair does not vote, the motion fails. The chair will state whether the motion has carried (passed) or was defeated.

Processes Groups Use

Using Consensus-Building

Some groups use an informal way of discussing issues and coming to agreement called *consensus*.

In a consensus process, every member shares information and considers what others share. Consensus decisions are made when the whole group comes to a mutual agreement. The process of building consensus can also help a group build and strengthen group relationships.

Every member shares

Make sure everyone is heard from and feels listened to. Avoid arguing for your own position. Present your position as clearly as possible. Listen to other group members' reactions and comments to see if they understand your position. Consider all reactions and comments carefully before you press your own point of view further.

Avoid majority vote

Avoid averaging, coin tosses or bargaining. When members finally agree, do not feel that they have to be rewarded by having their own way on some later point.

Allow time to build agreement

Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict, reach agreement, or "keep the peace." When agreement seems to come too quickly or easily, be suspicious. Change your mind only when the solution makes sense, not to make others happy.

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Families Ask Questions

What if I don't agree with the decision that was made and I feel like I gave in?

"If the purpose of getting everyone together for a meeting is to make decisions, then decisions need to be made. This helps the group move forward toward their goals.

In the middle of a meeting it can be hard to decide if you can live with a group decision. Don't agree if you don't agree. Everyone may need to compromise. Be persistent during the meeting so that you don't have regrets after the meeting.

Bring your concern back to the group only if you honestly can't live with the decision."

-Chris, parent

Processes Groups Use

Putting It Into Action

John and Laura arrive at their first meeting of the Reading Improvement Committee. They are greeted by the district's superintendent and a board member. They are invited to take a seat at the table.

The meeting begins with the superintendent welcoming everyone and then asking each person to introduce themselves. Laura is amazed at the number of people on the committee. There are teachers from almost every grade level, teachers from specific content areas as well as from the foreign language and arts department. Five parents, three community members, and two students are also part of the group.

Putting It Into Action *cont'd.*

The first meeting is spent reviewing the purpose of the committee. The superintendent calls upon the district's data analyst to share the various pieces of data that the district currently has available. Based on what the group knows, goals and timelines are set. They also divide up the committee into smaller subcommittees that will work on specific tasks. Each subcommittee has a leader which coordinates the team's work.

At the next meeting, each subcommittee provides a brief report on what their group has done. New information is shared with the larger committee from the data analyst. This continues at each meeting for the first two months. By the third month, subcommittees have completed their work and all report out to the larger committee to evaluate progress toward the group's goals. Additional information is needed and the subcommittees find themselves working on tasks for the larger group.

After nearly five months of work, the day has finally come for the Reading Improvement Committee to make a decision and prepare a recommendation to the school board. The committee has agreed to use consensus to make decisions.

NOTES