

## **Consensus Workshop - Part One**

*With Diana Leafe Christian*

### **9:00-10:00 am.**

**Overview: How Consensus Works.** *Skit #1: How Consensus Works.* Proposals, agenda planning, meeting roles (facilitator, stacker, minute taker, timekeeper, and optional: scribe, gatekeeper, vibes watcher), proposal phases (introduction/discussion/decision), three decision options (agreement, standing aside, blocking), meeting evaluations.

### **10:15-12:30 pm.**

**Pros & Cons, Requirements, Blocking, Pseudoconsensus, Meeting Roles.** How consensus differs from majority-rule voting—not a contest between the ayes and no’s and the power coalitions which majority-rule usually engenders, but a process of refining the proposal itself until everyone can support the proposal. The philosophy behind consensus: a group makes better, more effective decisions when the wisdom and concerns of a wide variety of people go into the decision. Consensus is slower in making the decision than majority-rule voting, yet faster in implementing decisions, because consensus avoids unconscious (or conscious!) foot-dragging or sabotage. Three requirements for consensus—common mission & purpose, training in the process, equal access to power among group members. More on supporting a proposal, standing aside from, and standing-in-the-way-of or blocking a decision (and what they each mean). Legitimate and illegitimate reasons for blocking, including examples from real community situations. Etiquette of blocking (how to regard and treat the blocking person, how to question the block when appropriate). The “sundown clause,” for when a group wants to try out a decision only for a certain period of time. Five signs of pseudoconsensus. How the facilitator serves the whole group (not any one person’s or faction’s agenda) and helps it keep the group’s agenda contract for how the group uses its time. How facilitating a consensus group differs from chairing a meeting. The purpose of minutes and decision logs. The minute-taker. The role of a participant in a consensus decision-making meeting. Twenty-one ways for participants to help meetings run smoothly.

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### **1:00 – 2:15 pm.**

**Facilitating Practice, I.** *Skit #2.* Skills for facilitating a meeting. Moving through an agenda, creating a “stack” of people who want to speak, periodically summarizing where the conversation is going (the “sense of the meeting”), and testing for consensus. *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

### **2:30 – 3:45 pm.**

**Facilitating Practice, II.** *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

### **4:00 – 5:00 pm.**

**Agenda Planning.** Why agendas can make or break a meeting. The use of “discretionary time.” Sample agendas. Crafting an effective agenda. Developing strong agenda-planning skills. *Small group exercise: Creating a Strong Agenda.*

## **Consensus Workshop - Part Two**

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### **9:00-10:30 am**

**Facilitation Tips, I.** *Skit #3.* Staying neutral and not expressing an opinion (and how to express one appropriately). Curbing excessively vocal group members, encouraging shyer ones. Keeping track of what's going on; how to do these several tasks simultaneously. The role of timekeeper, scribe, stacker, gatekeeper, and vibes watcher. *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

### **10:45-12:00**

**Facilitation Tips, II.** *Skit #4.* Brainstorms, conducting straw polls, breaking up into smaller groups, sending items to committee, suggesting a sunset clause. The public-private scale and other group exercises to get a sense of what everyone wants. The crucial role of end-of-meeting evaluations. *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

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### **1:00 – 2:15 pm**

**Dealing with Conflict in Meetings, I.** *Skit #5.* Creating and abiding by communication agreements. Heading off expected conflict by talking with specific people before the meeting, or during breaks. Dealing with aggressive or disruptive meeting behaviors. Using neutral language, using “I” rather than “you” statements. (Identifying fake “I” statements), using words for real feelings (instead of veiled accusations). Developing ways of speaking that reduce conflicts instead of escalating them. *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

### **2:30 – 3:45 pm**

**Dealing with Conflict in Meetings, II.** More practice facilitating with difficult meeting behaviors. *Exercise: Facilitation Practice.*

### **4:00 – 5:00 pm**

**Effective Proposals; Alternatives to Consensus.** Sample proposals. How to develop an effective proposal. Alternatives to pure consensus: the "agreement-seeking" methods: 60% to 90% voting, consensus-minus-one, consensus-minus-two, consensus with voting fallback, etc. Having two different decision-making methods for different purposes. Community governance models: the whole-meeting and committee structure, or whole-meeting and manager structure, or both.

The “colors of clarification” system.