# GP-MI Consensus Model,
as approved in Traverse City, 9/15/2018

**General Description of Consensus and When It Should be Used:**

The word "consensus" means that all members must consent for a decision to move forward. This approach cultivates 100% participation and cooperation. It stands in contrast to the "majority vote" method, which is more expedient but tends to foster competition and division.

The procedure should strive for consensus but retain the option of a fallback vote where consensus cannot be achieved.

The consensus procedure outlined here has been formulated to conduct meetings fostering non-violent communication. The procedure may be modified for meetings attended by more than 50 participants as it is not recommended for groups of more than 50.



## Preliminary Matters

If at all possible, seating for members should be in a circle. In this way everyone will be seen and heard, and 100% participation can be achieved by simply "going around the circle". Symbolically, the circle promotes the concepts of equality and democracy.

The meeting should start on time with **introductions**, having everyone state their name and why they came. This establishes the point that everyone is important and will be heard.

The Facilitator (who generally would be the Meeting Manager or someone designated by the Meeting Manager) will briefly define the **Roles** necessary for conducting the meeting and determine the members who will fill these roles. Roles include:

**Facilitator** – Provides impartial management of the meeting.

**Co-Facilitator** (A Co-facilitator may be necessary if the Facilitator wishes to take part in the discussion of a proposal.)

**Time Keeper** – This member focuses on the clock and warns the facilitator when allotted times near expiration.

**Note Taker** - Functions as part of the meeting team, sometimes reading out a final statement of the proposal before the facilitator checks for consensus or reminding us to get clear on who is doing what next. (Notetaker can optionally also be responsible for keeping minutes of the meeting.)

**Peacekeeper**- The only person with prior permission to interrupt a speaker or speak without first being recognized by the facilitator. Also, it is important to note that the peacekeeper's comments are always directed at the whole group, never at one individual or small group within the larger group. Keep comments short and to the point. Generally would step in to be sure rules are enforced.

**Stack Taker** - Keeps track of those who wish to speak on a subject and determines the order in which they are given the floor.
Once selected, the Facilitator will briefly explain the decision- making process and make a copy of a summary available to those who request it.  It is important for everyone to know how to participate. The brief explanation will include:

**Hand Signals** for communicating with the facilitator:
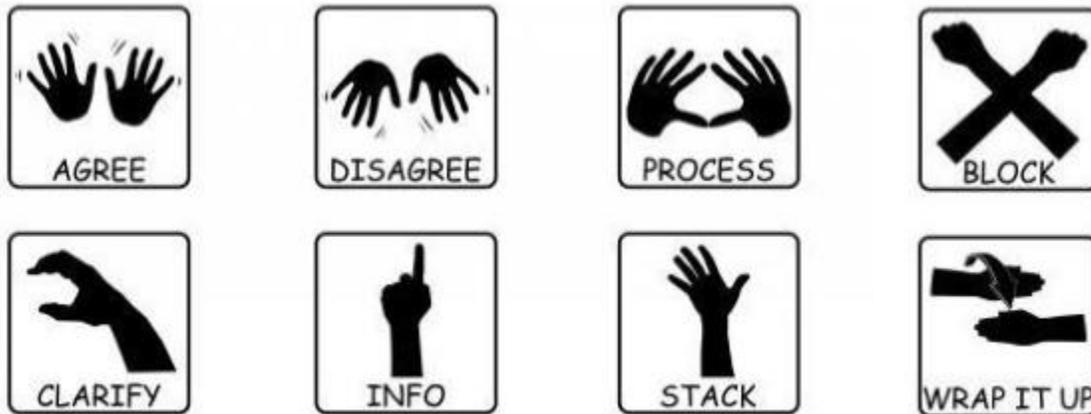


**Terminology** used in our process.

**Amendment** – A modification to a proposal that is made by the proposal's author. This is typically done during discussion in order to achieve consensus.

**Blocking Concern** – This is a concern that is based on The Green Party Ten Key Values. If a majority of the plenary agrees that a concern is a valid blocking concern, (that the proposal violates our Core Values in some way), the proposal as worded cannot be accepted.

**Clarifying Questions** – These are questions that pertain only to the wording of a proposal. They do not include any discussion of the background facts, merit, or intention of the proposal being considered.

**Closing Options** – These are the three options available for a proposal that has non-blocking concerns after time for discussion has run out. They include tabling the proposal, sending the proposal to committee for more work, and voting with a 2/3 majority required for acceptance.

**Concern** – Any objection expressed by a participant towards a proposal. The concern may be based on practicalities, philosophical perspective, Green Party Principles, or just a gut feeling.

**Consensus** – The situation where a proposal, after discussion, has garnered no concerns, or has resulted in concerns that are not valid blocks and where the participants expressing concerns have agreed to stand aside.

**Fallback Vote** – This is one Closing Option available after a Proposal has failed to achieve Consensus and has not been validly blocked. A 2/3 majority is required to pass a proposal by a fallback vote.

**Motion** – A participant's suggested remedy to an issue. This will be followed by discussion and a decision by the plenary. This is the same as a Proposal.

**Plenary** – The entire group of participants involved in discussing an issue.

**Point of Information** – A participant has information that will clarify the issue being discussed and thus save time.

**Point of Order** – A participant's statement that the discussion process has broken down and needs to be addressed immediately. This is synonymous with Point of Process.

**Point of Process** – This is a participant's statement that the discussion process has broken down and needs to be addressed immediately. This is synonymous with Point of Order

**Proposal** - A participant's suggested remedy to an issue. This will be followed by discussion and a decision by the plenary. This is the same as a Motion.

**Stack** – A list of names of participants who want to speak on the topic being discussed. Participants signal their desire to be included on the stack by raising a hand. Participants are called on in the order they were added to the stack. Every person on the stack will be called on to speak.

**Flow Chart** for Consensus Procedure:
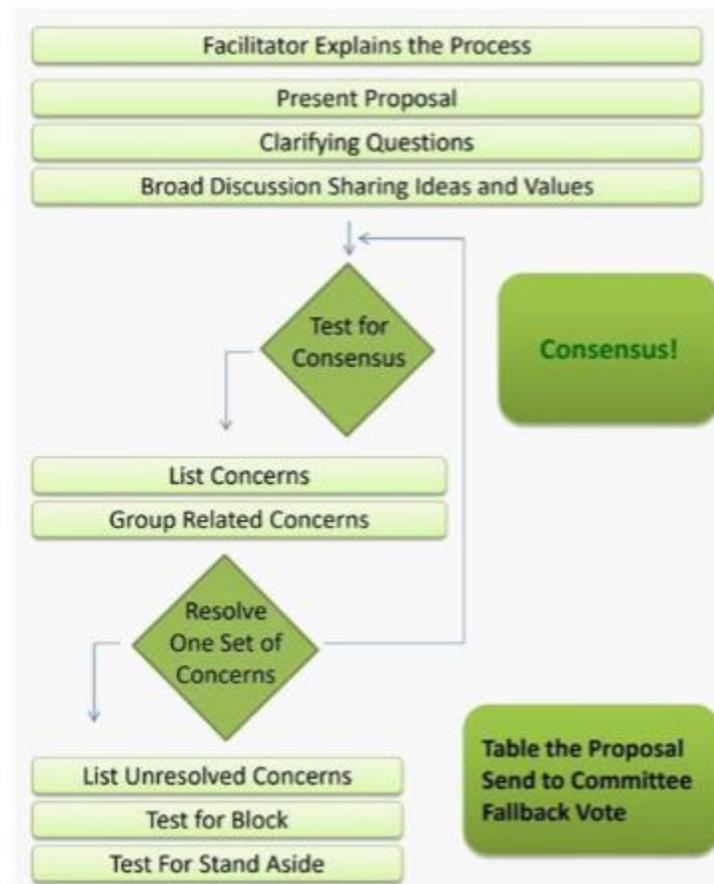


## Rules to Promote Respect

When discussing the merits of a proposal, participants will address the facilitator or other official such as the note taker.

The facilitator will not allow comments and questions to be directed from one participant to another. This rule will be strictly enforced and is intended to avoid personality conflicts.

The decision- making process depends on vigorous debate about the merits of a proposal. When the arguments on all sides are fully aired, the group is most likely to come to a wise decision. While a participant may attack an idea in strong terms, the facilitator must never allow personal attacks, no matter how veiled.

Under no circumstances will the facilitator allow participants to speculate upon the motives of others. Not only is it impossible to prove what motivates another, it is entirely irrelevant! Issues, not personalities, are always to be the subject of debate.

The facilitator will not allow the use of such terms as "liar", "lie", or "fraud". If the facilitator allows personal attacks, a Point of Process should be made by the Peacekeeper or by any participant immediately, alerting the facilitator to the infraction.

If the facilitator allows personal attacks to continue, a Point of Process should be made to immediately replace the facilitator. If a participant continues with personal attacks after being warned by the facilitator, the facilitator will exclude the offender from all further discussion on the topic of discussion.

**Request that participants use paper/pen to organize their thoughts**, in order to make efficient use of discussion time.

[Meeting details, which include the meeting agenda, may be established by methods defined in another document. The meeting agenda will direct the course events that follow. This document focuses on the process for reaching decisions.]

## Decision-Making Process

1. The decision- making process begins with a **Proposal**, (aka a Motion) which may be required to be submitted in advance of the meeting.

> A qualified Participant will describe a perceived need for a decision on some issue.

> A proposed remedy submitted orally or in writing will constitute a Proposal.

2. Once a Proposal is duly noted, the Facilitator will ask for **Clarifying Questions**.

> These pertain only to the wording and intended result of a proposal.

> Debate and discussion about accuracy or validity of the Proposal are not permitted at this time.

> The Note Taker will record all questions with the names of the Participants who asked.

> After all Clarifying Questions have been asked, the presenter will provide answers directly or with the help of others.

3. A **General Discussion** will follow

> This is a broad discussion of the related thoughts and ideas held by Participants.

> The Facilitator will consult the Agenda and the Plenary to determine a time limit for discussion. The

> Time Keeper will make note and periodically interrupt discussion to remind Participants of the time remaining.

> If many people want to speak, the Stack Taker will prepare the Stack

If a Stack is used, the Stack Taker signals when it is someone's turn to speak and announce who will follow.

Concerns are to be noted, but not discussed individually at this time. The focus should be on the Proposal as a whole.

The Facilitator will acknowledge points of agreement and disagreement, and examine the underlying reasons for both, which may be philosophical, principled, or based on practicalities.

If there are no concerns, the Facilitator will announce that a consensus has been reached.

4. **Identify and Resolve Concerns**

If there are concerns, the Co-Facilitator will list them on the whiteboard, hearing briefly from each Participant who has a concern. An effort will be made to group concerns that share some commonality.

Discussion will proceed on one concern at a time.

The Facilitator will ask for ways to modify (Amend) the Proposal to make it acceptable to the Participants who had the concern and the one who made the Proposal.

If it becomes clear that agreement cannot be reached, the objection will be recorded and the Facilitator will move on to the next concern.

When an Amendment is made, the Facilitator will ask the Note Taker to read back the Proposal with its amendment.

The Facilitator will ask if there are other concerns. If none are expressed, the Facilitator will announce that a consensus has been reached. Otherwise, the process is repeated.

5. **Closing Options**

If all concerns are not resolved before time runs out on the Proposal, the Facilitator will poll the Plenary to determine the next course of action, which may be
1) to table the Proposal until a future meeting,
2) ask opposing members to work out a solution in committee and then submit their solution as a new Proposal, or
3) vote on the issue, with a 2/3 majority required for approval.

Note that the Plenary may decide at any time that a concern is a valid **blocking measure** because it shows that the Proposal violates one of our **Ten Key Values** in a specified way. In that case, the Proposal as stated is rejected. Also note that a concern does not constitute a blocking measure unless it is shown to violate one of our Ten Key Values.

When a consensus has been reached, the Proposal is accepted. The Note Taker will record it as a Decision.

**Resources and Reference Material:**

http://www.consensus.net/ocac2.html

http://www.txgreens.org/consensusprocess

https://www.greenparty.ca/en/party/documents/rules-procedure-abridged

http://sfgreenparty.org/about-us/14-consensus

http://gpus.org/organizing-tools/a-process-manual/

http://sfgreenparty.org/about-us/

http://sfgreenparty.org/about-us/14-consensus

http://gpus.org/organizing-tools/a-process-manual/

http://www.vagreenparty.org/consensus.html

https://treegroup.info/library/consensus_basics/