



CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING TOOLKIT

a Martha Kostuch Legacy

August 2010



About the *Clean Air Strategic Alliance*

The Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) is a multi-stakeholder partnership composed of representatives selected by industry, government and nongovernment organizations. Every partner is committed to a comprehensive air quality management system for Alberta. All CASA groups and teams, including the board of directors, make decisions and recommendations by consensus. CASA supports three air quality management goals:

1. protect the environment by preventing short and long-term adverse effects on people, animals and the ecosystem,
2. optimize economic efficiency, and
3. promote pollution prevention and continuous improvement.



About the *Alberta Water Council*

Established in 2004, the Alberta Water Council is a multi-stakeholder partnership with 24 members from governments, industry, and non-government organizations. Its primary task is to monitor and steward implementation of the Alberta's Water for Life strategy and to champion achievement of the strategy's three outcomes:

1. a safe, secure drinking water supply,
2. healthy aquatic ecosystems, and
3. reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Martha Kostuch Legacy Workshop Project Team for leading the development of this tool. We would also like to thank Alberta Environment, CNRL, MEGlobal and Bullfrog Power for their contributions to the workshop. In addition, we value the contribution of the many stakeholders who provided insights during the development of the toolkit.

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CONTENTS

Contents

ABOUT	About this Toolkit.	4
INTRO	Introduction: Improving the Consensus Decision-Making Process	5
TOOL 1	Screening: Determining whether an Issue is Suitable for a Consensus Process?	7
TOOL 2	Necessary Conditions for Consensus Decision-Making Process	11
TOOL 3	Communication Checklist.	15
TOOL 4	Checklist for Staying on Course	19
TOOL 5	Reaching Consensus and Dealing with Blocks to Consensus.	25
TOOL 6	Implementing and Monitoring Checklist.	29
TOOL 7	Example Template for Terms of Reference	33
TOOL 8	Sample Communication Tools	37
TOOL 9	Checklist for Successful Meetings.	41

ABOUT

About this Toolkit

This is a collaborative publication by the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) and the Alberta Water Council (AWC); two multi-stakeholder organizations that use consensus decision-making to improve air quality and water management in Alberta, respectively.

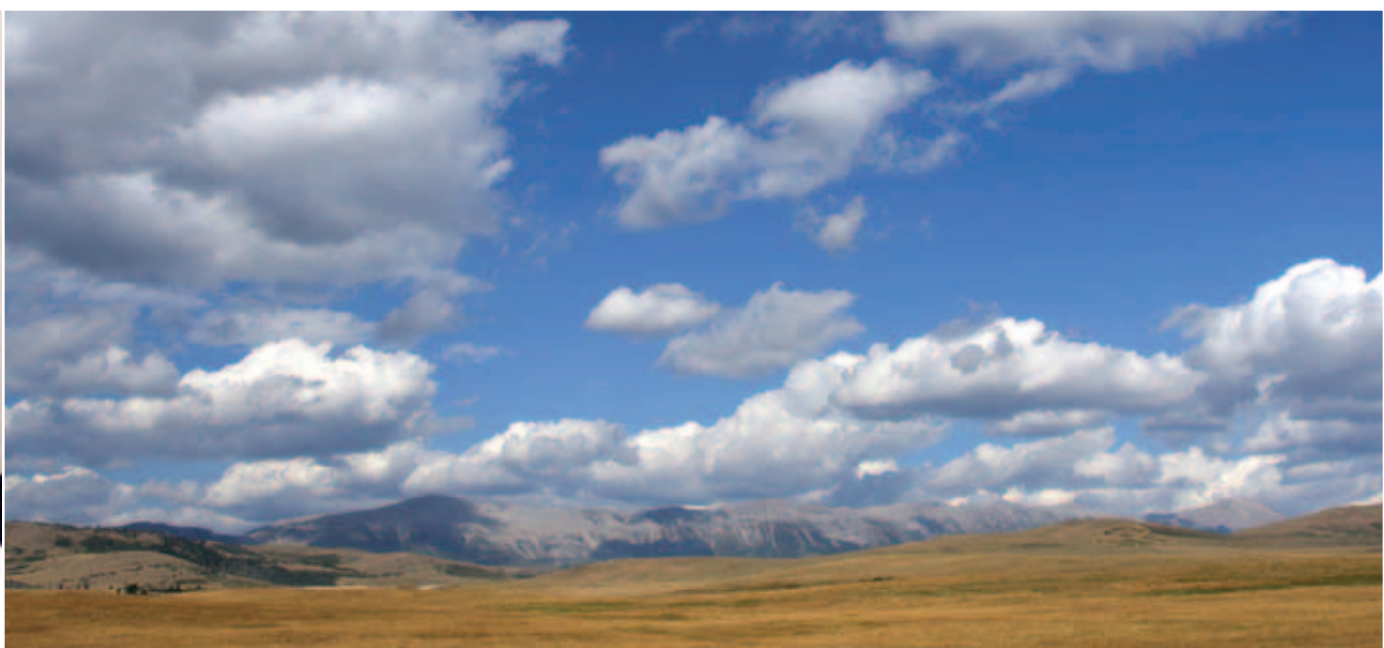
Funding for this document was provided by CASA and AWC. The toolkit is also part of a larger initiative to honor Dr. Martha Kostuch who passed away in April 2008. Dr. Kostuch was a nationally recognized

environmental activist who made a significant contribution to our understanding of consensus decision-making and how it can lead to innovative and sustainable solutions. Martha was also passionate about the need to provide people with practical skills to work with others from diverse perspectives so they could solve important environmental issues. We are pleased to present this work as part of her continuing legacy.

For information on the principles and theory of consensus decision-making we refer readers to: *Beyond Consultation: Making Consensus Decisions* by the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, and *Building Consensus for a Sustainable Future: Putting Principles into Practice* by the National Round Table on Environment and Economy. The CASA and AWC websites contain procedural guidelines, ground rules and other materials to support the consensus process. For further information go to www.casahome.org and www.awchome.ca.



Dr. Martha Kostuch



INTRO

Introduction: Improving the Consensus Decision-Making Process

In consensus decision-making (CDM), people with diverse interests agree to work together to find solutions to challenging problems. Fundamental to this process is that all parties agree to work collaboratively to find solutions in the best interests of all.

An implicit benefit of the consensus process is that mutual understanding and respect develops as people search together for the best solutions. Participants work together to get tough on the problem rather than getting tough with each other. They rely on the collective experience and knowledge of the group. The results are high quality decisions that last longer than decisions made by one party and are more easily implemented because all stakeholders agreed with them.

The genesis of this toolkit was the “Bridging Interests Building Agreement” workshop held on December 2nd and 3rd 2009 in Edmonton, Alberta. This workshop brought together over one hundred participants from organizations using consensus decision-making, including among others

- The Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA)
- The Alberta Water Council (AWC)
- Airshed Zones and the Alberta Airshed Council
- Watershed Planning Advisory Councils (WPACs)

Workshop participants shared their experiences working with CDM — both the considerable benefits and the challenges — and identified the need for tools to help them navigate challenging areas. The result is this toolkit. The objective of the toolkit is twofold: to help people identify what factors need to be in place to conduct a consensus process, and to offer practical suggestions for what to do when problems arise.

There are two primary audiences for this toolkit; those who are considering convening a CDM process and those who are already participating in a CDM process. The checklists will introduce various steps and considerations that should be explored throughout a CDM process and will provide ideas for tuning up a process that is underway.

The toolkit contains a combination of checklists and templates. When working through the checklists there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. They simply offer useful information for making CDM processes more robust and increasing the likelihood of a successful experience and outcome.

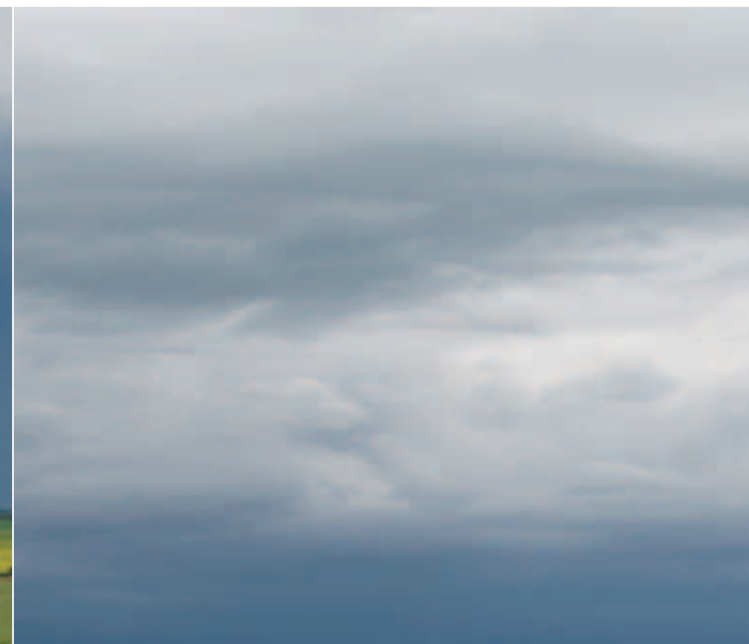
The Toolkit contains the following:

1. A screening checklist to help determine if an issue is suitable for a consensus process
2. A ‘necessary conditions’ checklist to help get a CDM process started
3. A communication checklist
4. A checklist for responding to challenging behaviours
5. A primer on testing for, and dealing with blocks to, consensus
6. An evaluation and monitoring checklist
7. A template for developing a terms of reference
8. Sample communication tools for consensus processes
9. A meeting checklist

TOOL 1

Screening: Determining whether an Issue is Suitable for a Consensus Process?

Your organization has an issue or conflict to address. This screening tool will help determine whether the issue is suited to being resolved through a consensus decision-making (CDM) process. The tool contains a list of considerations to explore and provides insights on the conditions that should be in place before submitting an issue to a CDM process. After conducting the analysis, you will have a good sense of whether a CDM process is the right approach for the issue. In some situations you may not arrive at a clear “yes” or “no” answer and the analysis may lead you to conclude that a more in-depth assessment (e.g. a comprehensive ‘screen and scope’¹) is necessary before deciding conclusively that an issue is appropriate for consensus decision-making.



Main Consideration:

Should this issue be resolved using a consensus decision-making process?

BREAKING IT DOWN

1a) General indicators that the issue is a “good fit” and amenable to being addressed in a CDM process

INDICATORS

- There is a realization among stakeholders that the status quo is not acceptable
- There is a critical mass of interested stakeholders, i.e.
 - A majority of affected stakeholders agree the issue is a problem and that change is necessary
 - They are interested in finding a solution though they hold divergent opinions and interests
 - Influential stakeholders are willing to participate
 - Those needed to implement solutions are willing to participate
- Stakeholders believe a consensus process will be more favorable than the alternatives
- No one party holds all the answers or has full knowledge of either the problem or potential solutions
- Key stakeholders are able to contribute time and effort to the process
- There is a convener willing to bring stakeholders to the table
- Resources (financial, technical, logistical) are available to support the process
- Enough stakeholders are willing to do an initial “screen and scope” to bring further clarity to the issue (see footnote 1)

BREAKING IT DOWN

1b) As convener, indicators that this is the *best* issue for your organization to take on

INDICATORS

- The issue fits within your organizational mandate
- The issue is one of your priorities
- Resources are available/stakeholders are willing to contribute resources to the issue
- Stakeholders believe that change is needed and are willing to work collaboratively to solve the issue
- The issue fits within your current business plan
- Resolving the issue will help your organization deliver on one or more of its key business objectives

BREAKING IT DOWN

1c) Indicators that the issue *should not* be resolved through CDM

INDICATORS

- The issue is an emergency — something that is imminent and poses a real threat to people, the environment or the economy — and requires immediate resolution
- The issue is clearly within the mandate of an existing organization that is willing to address the problem and the solution is obvious and acceptable to all
- The issue is straight-forward and easily understood, disputants are very few in number and their interests/needs are homogenous
- Key stakeholders refuse to participate in the process

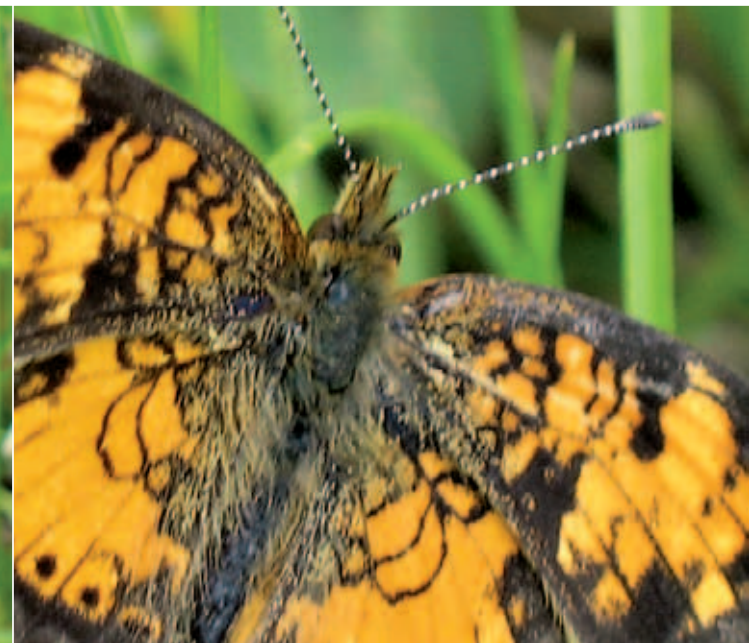
¹ The reader may be interested in CASA's *Comprehensive Air Quality Management System* booklet, in particular for items 1(b) and 1(c). A formal screening assessment may be conducted to increase clarity, identify underlying interests and determine the information needed to support the process.



TOOL 2

Necessary Conditions for Consensus Decision-Making Process

Once an initial screening to determine if the issue is 'ripe' for consensus is conducted, a closer look is required. Some necessary conditions involving work by the convener, stakeholders and teams must be in place for a consensus process to find success. While many participants will want to dive directly into the content of the issue, taking the time to lay the foundation as described below will allow the process to be more efficient.



Main Consideration: Launching the process

BREAKING IT DOWN

2a) Convener considerations when setting up the team or committee

INDICATORS

- Potential stakeholder groups (industry associations, government departments, NGO organizations/community groups) are identified and invited to select their representative
- Where government is a key stakeholder, there is political will to address the issue and commitment to implement consensus solutions
- Convener identifies skill sets needed at the table and informs stakeholder groups
- CDM orientation/training is provided (can be formal or informal depending on the issue and the relative experience of the participants)
- Procedures, templates and checklists are available to support the team (ground rules, document templates, procedural guidelines, communications protocols, etc.)

BREAKING IT DOWN

2b) Participant considerations

INDICATORS

- The issue is one of several priorities for your organization
- Your organization has the capacity to participate
- Experience with CDM is desirable, however novices are welcome
- Your organization (and its representative) supports the use of CDM for this particular issue
- Time commitment to properly participate is fully understood — time for preparation, reading materials, travelling, attending meetings, etc.
- Resources are available to support your participation (honoraria, travel, meal costs, etc.)
- Your organization has considered its best/worst alternative and concluded that the risks and opportunities are better addressed through the CDM process

BREAKING IT DOWN

2c) Team considerations

INDICATORS

- Team develops its terms of reference (see Tool 7, page 33)
- Team has a common understanding of what consensus will look like to them (see Tool 5, page 25)
- Team understands the fallback in the event consensus may not be reached
- Roles and responsibilities are clear and understood (e.g. chairperson(s), project manager, facilitator, recorder)
- Work plan with key milestones and timelines is in place
- Team has an agreed-upon process for gathering key information (technical, scientific, economic)
- Team has agreed on a process for how to involve experts or those with specific topic knowledge



TOOL 3

Communication Checklist

Effective communication is critical at all stages of the consensus process. Team members need to communicate with each other, with their stakeholder group, with experts, with the convening agency and possibly with the public. Communication skills are highly valued in a CDM process. It takes patience to learn how to listen actively, to hear other peoples' stories and to explore possible solutions. This checklist covers common communication needs and provides options to improve a group's communication on all levels. The reader is also referred to Tool 8 on page 37 for sample communication tools.



Main Consideration:

Communication needs

BREAKING IT DOWN

3a) Considerations for communicating at the table

INDICATORS

- Chairpersons, project manager, facilitator model appropriate communications skills. Encourage team members to:
 - Listen to understand (own mental tape is turned off)
 - Use open-ended questions to probe and learn
 - Be reflective
- Team takes time to get to know each other
- Team members:
 - Ask clarifying questions
 - Respect diverse views and ideas
 - Build on each other's knowledge
- Team members are able to articulate their stakeholder's interests and desired outcomes
- Chairperson checks in with silent members
- Ground rules are in place to remind team of appropriate communication behaviours



BREAKING IT DOWN

3b) Considerations for communicating with your stakeholder group

INDICATORS

- Time is built into the work plan for team members to communicate with their stakeholder groups
- Team members are familiar with and can navigate the decision-making structure within their sector
- Team members are able to articulate their stakeholder’s interests and desired outcomes
- Team members have access to key decision-makers within their organization or sector
- Team members have access to people within their organization or sector with whom ideas and solutions can be tested and feedback sought
- Members are able to effectively communicate the options or trade-offs
- As solutions or agreements emerge, materials are available for team members to use (written briefing notes, PowerPoint slides) when communicating with their stakeholder group
- Team has a fallback plan in the event there is no response or silence from one of the stakeholder groups
 - Options: consider sending a sub-delegation to meet with the stakeholder group or submit a formal written request asking for feedback by a certain date

BREAKING IT DOWN

3c) Considerations for communicating with those external to the CDM table

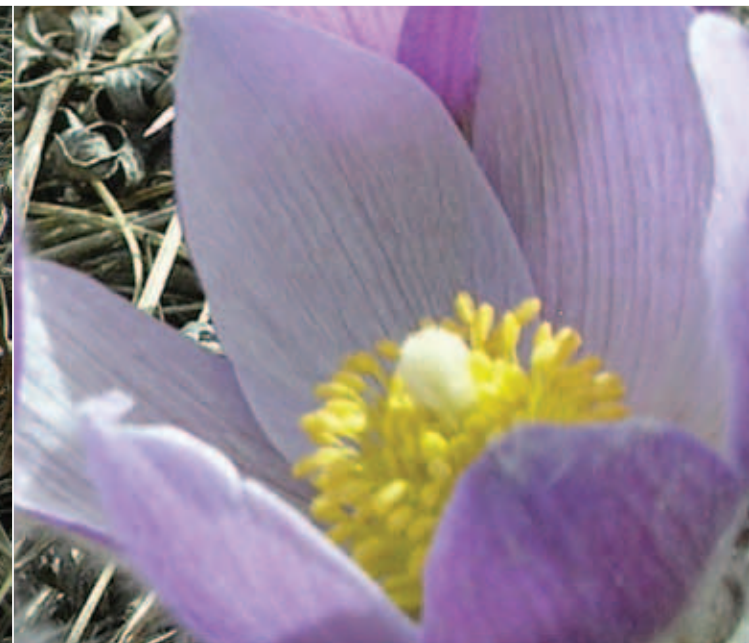
INDICATORS

- Team has an agreed-upon communications protocol:
 - WHO will speak on behalf of the team (to the media, to other interested stakeholders, to convening body)
 - WHAT will be communicated — milestones, preliminary agreements, key considerations?
- Team has a website, newsletter or other mechanism where public and others can get appropriate information (if necessary)
- Team has a process to help its members communicate with sectors that have diverse membership with diverse interests

TOOL 4

Checklist for Staying on Course

There are always stories of when processes went awry. In hindsight, there were visible flags, but noticed too late to correct the process. Below is a list of behaviours that could indicate a team is in need of assistance and options to respond while keeping the process intact. However, it is important to remember that there may be many causes for a participant's behaviour (for example, are you crossing your arms because you're defensive or are you cold?). Always find ways to talk about these behaviours and allow people the freedom to explain before assumptions are made.



Main Consideration:

Behaviours that require attention

BREAKING IT DOWN

4a) Attendance at meetings is lagging (see also Team is revisiting old ground)

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Contact members and ask why — depending on the response you may need to ask the stakeholder group to select a new member
- Team has not gotten into the 'nitty gritty' and is still gathering information or fact-finding. Attendance will increase once discussion moves to more substantive issues
- Meetings are not productive — co-chairs need to take corrective action by adding substantive items to the agenda and moving things along
- The project may be low priority — ask: whether the team members prefer to be on a mailing list and receive written updates from time to time?

BREAKING IT DOWN

4b) Members are not prepared for meetings

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Members receive meeting materials at the last minute — use the 1 in 4 rule: for monthly meetings materials will be distributed one week in advance
- Materials are very technical/complex for members to digest — consider the need for the sub-group to break information down into manageable chunks or the need for group training on technical aspects of issues
- More time is needed between meetings (to read materials, to do tasks, talk with others, etc.)

BREAKING IT DOWN

4c) Individual member keeps going back over old ground

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Probe and explore to determine if the member’s concern is valid. Test with the team — do others have a similar concern?
- Member may need better understanding or clarification of a previous item before being comfortable moving on
- If member’s behaviour is not justified, chairperson uses agenda to keep discussion on track
- As a last resort, the team as a whole makes it clear to the individual that the behaviour is a violation of the process. Team can consider asking the stakeholder group to replace its representative

BREAKING IT DOWN

4d) Several team members keep revisiting old ground or previous decision

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Alarm bells should be ringing. Chairperson/facilitator needs to engage the team members to identify the cause. Several factors could be at play:
 - A previous decision is not satisfactory and needs to be reopened
 - Previous item is not properly understood and the team needs more discussion (and possibly more information) to understand the pros and cons of the issue before moving on
 - Team doesn’t know where it is going — needs a clear work plan and direction as to the path forward
 - Stalling tactic — members are not yet ready to discuss the ‘nitty gritty’ and move on to tough issues
 - Members don’t trust each other yet and are not comfortable enough to move on

BREAKING IT DOWN

4e) Members use inappropriate tone, volume or content of communication

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Remind entire team of ground rules
- Model appropriate tone and volume
- Speak to the offender off-line to understand behaviour
 - Person may need suggestions on appropriate communication style
- If behaviour continues, ask the team how they want to deal with the behaviour
- If behaviour is not warranted, speak to the sector about the impact of this behaviour and discuss a need to change behaviour or to replace its representative

BREAKING IT DOWN

4f) Team lacks requisite skills

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Identify skill sets needed during “screening” exercise
- Provide training on process skills
- Hire consultants/experts to supplement technical skill sets
- By agreement, one or more members provide experts to assist the team
- Part of the process is to increase people’s knowledge of the issue (people don’t come to the table with all of the knowledge)

BREAKING IT DOWN

4g) Team members don't have decision-making authority

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Address in roles and responsibilities protocol
- When inviting representatives to participate, be clear about the level of decision-making needed
- Allow time for team members to obtain necessary authority from their organization
- Help team members reach decision makers (send delegation, provide written briefing materials, organize meetings and provide logistical support)

BREAKING IT DOWN

4h) Tasks are not completed or team keeps asking for extension of its deadline

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- The workload is too large or the timelines are too short
- Revisit the work plan and time frame
- Request additional resources or extension of timeline
- Team does not have adequate project management support — seek more resources

BREAKING IT DOWN

4i) Team members breach protocol by speaking to the media

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Ensure the team has a communications protocol that addresses whether it is appropriate for members to speak to the media
- Recognize that some participants speak to the media as part of their regular job
- Clarify if the breach was intentional or accidental
 - The person may not be aware of a breach
 - The person may not be aware of the rules
- Determine if the breach is substantial enough to harm the process and analyze the options to move forward

BREAKING IT DOWN

4j) Member threatens to leave the table

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Clarify why – probe and explore to understand the member’s concern
- Person may be feeling his/her interests are not respected
- Make sure the environment is conducive to all members being able to express their opinions, interests, wants, etc.
- If this is a bullying or stalling tactic, remind the person of ground rules and CDM principles
- If behaviour continues, the following actions are taken in the following order:
 1. Chairperson or someone the team trusts speaks to person off-line about impact of behaviour
 2. Chairperson asks the team how they want to deal with this behaviour
 3. Other members might offer to caucus with the offender to try and solve the situation
 4. Speak to the member’s stakeholder group about their representative’s behaviour and its impact on the process
 5. Ask stakeholder group to replace their representative

BREAKING IT DOWN

4k) Discussion strays outside of team’s mandate

CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Be flexible; discussion sometimes has to be outside the box before coming back inside
- Team may need to explore or be more knowledgeable about the broader environment before accepting its boundaries
- If this is persistent, engage team on whether it is necessary to broaden its scope. It may be that existing problem cannot be solved within current boundaries
- If necessary, inform the convening body (with request to change the mandate and supporting information)

TOOL 5

Reaching Consensus and Dealing with Blocks to Consensus

Consensus processes involve internal thought as much as team dynamics. Participants need to do some soul-searching to discover their own underlying interests before they can articulate them to others. Effective participants at the table have a clear sense of what is important to them and are open to all possible options that could meet those interests. The ability to integrate ideas and interests from others into one solution is a key skill for success and requires focusing on the issue in the spirit of teamwork. When solutions cannot be found, team members are responsible for standing up for their interests, but in a way that respects the work of the group. This tool provides guidance on participant conduct and some of the intangible thought processes found in a creative consensus process.



Generate Options and Test Solutions

- Brainstorm without evaluating or criticizing. Get all possible ideas onto the table:
 - Look for synthesis, alignment and harmony.
 - Don't ignore orphans — ideas that don't seem to fit or fall into an identifiable category.
 - Do an initial categorization to get a sense of workable solutions (group into good, possible, not good; or green, amber, red, etc.).
 - Consider using agreed-upon criteria to evaluate options.
- Group chooses someone they trust to write up text of specific solutions or recommendations (can be chairperson, project manager, team member or facilitator).
 - Writer faithfully follows the direction and spirit of the group and makes only those word changes that will clarify the meaning of the option.
 - Text is shared with the team in advance of the next meeting to allow soak time and the opportunity to test proposed solution with stakeholders.
 - Team meets and notes agreement and disagreement on specific options. Some options may be discarded, others set aside for further consideration.
- Team considers whether further work is needed to understand implications of options (possibly needs more data, analysis, technical information to fully understand pros and cons of various options).
- Chairperson (or team members) probe for underlying reasons behind disagreements — discuss those underlying reasons and make sure they are clear and understood by all members.

Test for Consensus

- State proposal (specific recommendation, solution, etc.) clearly.
- Write it on a flip chart or whiteboard if necessary.
- Ask the following questions:
 - Does everyone understand what is being proposed? Consider asking each member to state his or her interpretation of what is being proposed and the anticipated outcomes or results.
 - Does anyone have any unresolved concerns with what is being proposed?
 - Can everyone live with this outcome?
 - Is there anyone who cannot support this proposal?
- Go around the table and make eye contact with everyone; ask everyone to verbally indicate their support.
- Test silences. Ask members directly: "Do you agree with this recommendation? Does your stakeholder support this proposal?"
- Have the note-taker read back the decision to the group.
- Record the decision with tasks — who, what, timeline, implementation.

TOOL 6

Implementing and Monitoring Checklist

Consensus agreements are normally contingent on how a particular solution or group of solutions is to be implemented. A group may reach consensus on new environmental standards for air emissions or a strategy to manage water flow, however such consensus is only possible after the group has had lengthy deliberation on such things as the time frame for bringing in the new regulations, the technology that will be used, its cost, the enforceability of the regulations, and so forth. Participants spend a good deal of time deliberating: Who will do this? When will it be done? How will it be done? Only when these questions are answered and agreed to will the group be comfortable signing off on the broader strategy. Following is a checklist of some of the considerations to be explored at this final stage of the consensus process.



Main Consideration: Implementing and monitoring

BREAKING IT DOWN

6a) Implementation considerations

OPTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Those who are to implement the solutions/recommendations should be at the table and be part of the consensus agreement
- Ensure the solutions are technically sound and congruent with existing legislation and policies
Note: Team should have explored these implications before reaching consensus
- Ensure the implementing parties commit to addressing funding needs
- Identify mechanisms to handle or follow-up on unforeseen difficulties

BREAKING IT DOWN

6b) What should be in an implementation plan?

OPTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Final report contains an implementation plan with enough detail that implementers know what is intended
 - Implementation plan is specific with details of who, what, why, where and when
 - Plan describes very specific outcomes or targets with the 'how and when' to be decided by the implementing body, or
 - Plan falls somewhere between the two examples above
- Plan should provide direction on how progress will be tracked

BREAKING IT DOWN

6c) Monitoring — how will we know that our recommendations have been successful?

OPTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Team considers 'who will monitor that our recommendations are being carried out' and 'how will we know that the intended results were achieved?'
- How will parties hold each other to commitments?
 - One option is to be specific about expected performance measures — e.g. if action A is carried through as per agreement, we will expect to see XX results
- Team to consider option of reconvening the process at a subsequent date to review if work has been successful, or recommending some other body be convened to assess the results

BREAKING IT DOWN

6d) Evaluation considerations — how did we do?

OPTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Convening body conducts a post-project evaluation — what worked, what needs to be improved
- Results should be communicated to all stakeholder groups, including those not at the table

TOOL 7

Example Template for Terms of Reference

It is very important that a team takes all the time needed to develop its terms of reference. Drafting the terms of reference can seem bureaucratic and time-consuming for people who would rather jump right into substantive issues, however; experience has proven that a lack of clarity about the task or mandate and the expected end-product is a common cause of processes getting derailed. The old adage: *go slow to go fast* makes most sense in the early stages of a CDM process. The clearer a team's terms of reference, the greater likelihood the team will avoid many of the challenges that can arise. Terms of reference should be concise and two pages maximum is recommended.



1. Purpose or Mission Statement

- Why are we here? What task have we been asked to accomplish? *Examples:*
 - To develop a strategy for dealing with squirrel infestation in Christine’s neighbourhood
 - To revise Alberta’s air quality guidelines for ozone
 - To identify gaps in the consensus decision-making process and make recommendations for filling those gaps
 - To improve how water flow is managed on the North Saskatchewan River

2. Goals and Objectives

- What is our expected deliverable? *Examples:*
 - A strategic plan with goals, objectives, strategies and tactics
 - An advisory report for consideration by a higher authority
 - A list of recommendations or final decisions?
 - Will the final product include broad advice or specific details about how recommendations are to be implemented?
- How will we know we have accomplished our task?
 - All elements of terms of reference have been completed
 - Consensus (agreement) has been reached
 - There is an implementation plan

3. Scope of Project

- What are the boundaries for this project?
- What items are on/off the table?
- What is the process for amending/revisiting terms of reference if new information comes along?

4. Decision-making

Note: this may be covered by a separate procedural guidelines document, but the team must at a minimum be clear about how it will make decisions

- Decisions that will be made by consensus
- Decisions that will be made by voting (normally administrative items)
- Quorum for decision-making (for consensus and administrative items)
- Fallback in the event consensus cannot be reached

5. Membership and Composition of Team

- Who has a stake in the outcome (deal-makers, deal-breakers and implementers)?
- Are all interests at the main table? Is there a broader circle of interests that need to be kept informed?

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- Team selects a chair (or co-chairs)
- Roles of individual members and support functions are clear (may be addressed in procedural documents)
- Roles of technical experts are clear (may be covered separately as need for technical experts may not arise until later)
- How we will behave? (may be covered in separate ground rules)

7. Budget

- Resources needed to support project
 - Estimated costs for information gathering, for expert consultants to conduct technical or economic analyses, literature reviews, fact-finding missions, etc.
 - Logistical resources (meeting space, materials, meals, travel, honoraria, site visits, workshops, etc.)
 - Administrative resources (project management, facilitator, note taker, printing etc.)
 - Sources of funds

8. Reporting

- How, when and to whom will the team report?
- What will be reported? (Key milestones, breakthroughs, areas where the team needs guidance or is stuck)
- What will the final report contain? (In-depth assessment of issue, pros and cons of various potential solutions, consensus conclusions and recommendations, implementation plan, etc.)

9. Timelines

- Timeline to accomplish task and submit final report (or recommendations, strategy, etc.)
- Frequency of team meetings

TOOL 8

Sample Communication Tools

Throughout a consensus process, good communication is essential. Whether you are communicating with those at the table, with your stakeholder group or with external groups, exchanging ideas and respecting the process can be a challenging task. Listening is the key to understanding. To be heard, you need to clearly articulate your points while respecting the people listening. When conversations get tough, these skills are most important. There are numerous ways to communicate and tools to help. Below are some ideas.



Communicating at the table

- Use open-ended questions, reframing, active listening, and probing
- Use the agenda: consider having a standing agenda item, "Feedback from Stakeholders"
- Structure the process to facilitate collaborative discussion
 - Round tables
 - Presentation by a team member or 'topic expert' followed by adequate time for Q & As
 - Process checks — how are we doing?
 - Use post-it notes to generate or evaluate ideas without criticism
 - Consider straw dogs to test ideas
 - Small group huddles (break out tables)
 - Workshops
 - Retreats
- Consider a facilitator or neutral person for discussions at critical junctures or for 'hot potato' topics

Communicating with your stakeholder group

- Provide updates at regularly scheduled meetings or schedule a special meeting when feedback is needed
- Use:
 - Scheduled meetings
 - Phone conversations
 - Email
 - Caucus with other stakeholders that have interests similar to yours

Support materials

- Briefing Notes
- PowerPoint Slides
- Background papers (technical reports, literature reviews, economic analysis, etc.)
- Communications should always include a request for feedback!

Communicating with those not at the table

- Website — post meeting minutes and other materials
- Newsletter
- Fact sheets
- Public meetings (town halls, open houses)
- Ads in newspapers, TV and radio
- Feature pieces in newspapers
- Mailing lists

Support materials

- Briefing notes
 - PowerPoint slides
 - Key messages
 - Others agreed to by team
- Be clear whether the purpose is to *inform* or to *consult*



TOOL 9

Checklist for Successful Meetings

Successful meetings are the result of successful planning. Taking the time to carefully plan the agenda and establish good practices during the meeting will save time in the long run. Stakeholders are more likely to remain committed when meetings are productive and efficient. Below is some guidance on how to plan and execute a successful meeting.



Before the Meeting

- Purpose of meeting is clear. The desired deliverables/outcomes are
- Items that MUST be on the agenda to accomplish outcomes are....
- For each item there is a lead person and supporting materials (and lead person is aware)
- Information is distributed to the group in advance with adequate time to read and prepare
- If key decisions are to be made, the relevant people are in attendance and there is quorum
- Agenda items that can be eliminated and dealt with off-line are...
- Other information the team needs to know at this meeting (from others at the table, about related processes, from sub-committees) is.....
- External people (guests, experts) have been notified and invited
- Co-chairs have a plan for managing the agenda during the meeting
- Our plan for dealing with process issues (such as going around in circles, someone talking too much, late comers, inappropriate behaviour, lack of energy) is....





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