



# CONSENSUS-BASED DECISION MAKING

QRSC Workshop



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Tradition

“For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”



# 12<sup>th</sup> Tradition

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”



# What is consensus-based making (“CBDM”)?

In Narcotics Anonymous, we make decisions by seeking direction from a loving Higher Power as it expresses itself in our group conscience.

The principle of anonymity in NA means we serve as equals, and consensus-based decision making (CBDM) is one method for a service body, as a team of equals, to hear that group conscience.

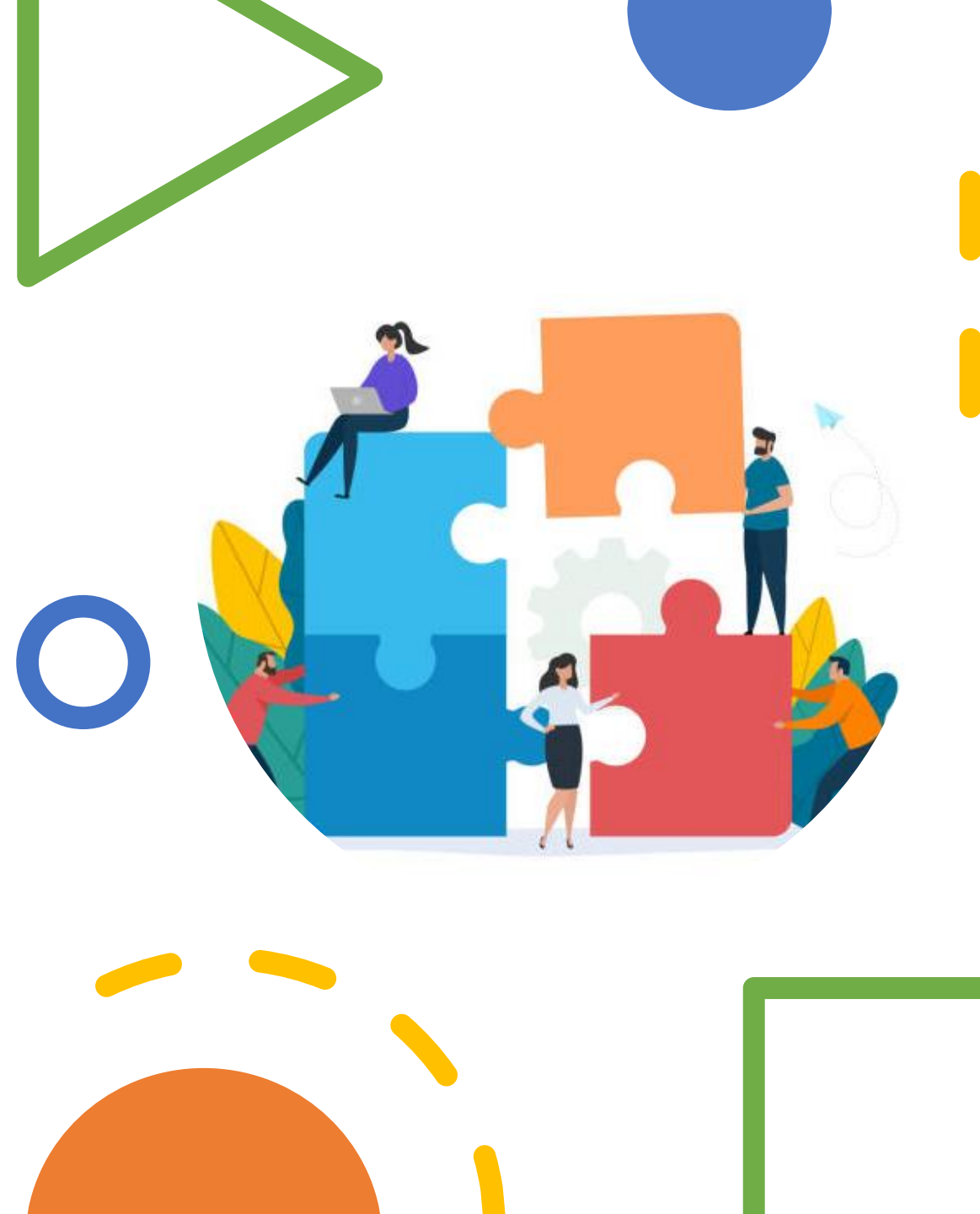
The heart of consensus is a cooperative intent, where members are willing to work together to find or create the solution that meets the needs of the service body.



CBDM rests on the fundamental belief that each member of the body holds a piece of the larger truth. In this spirit, we strive for consensus to affirm the principles inherent in both the Seventh and Ninth Concepts.

A decision reached by a consensus-based process may not mean total unanimity, but in CBDM, consensus can exist when each member of the service body is able to say:

- ✓ I had the opportunity to voice my opinions.
- ✓ I believe the service body has heard me.
- ✓ I can accept the service body's decision, even if it is not what I would choose as an individual.





## 6<sup>th</sup> Concept of NA Service

“Group conscience is the spiritual means by which we invite a loving God to influence our decisions.”



## 7<sup>th</sup> Concept of NA Service


“All members of a service body bear substantial responsibility for that body’s decisions and should be allowed to fully participate in its decision-making processes.”





## 9<sup>th</sup> Concept of NA Service

“All elements of our service structure have the responsibility to carefully consider all viewpoints in their decision-making processes.”





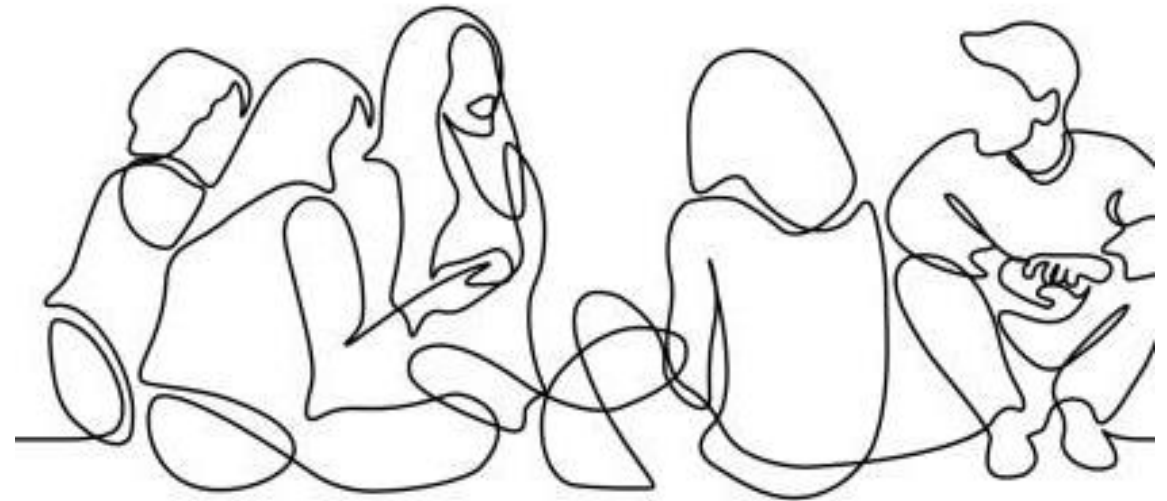
## Why consensus-based decision making?

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CBDM isn't just about guidelines, Concepts or Traditions. It's about a group conscience process that connects us with a Higher Power.

Our service bodies meetings should be forums where trusted servants can be heard, and CBDM is about listening.

With its emphasis on inclusion, collaboration, and consensus building, CBDM is in harmony with our spiritual principles. The consensus process is how we manifest the idea "together we can do what we cannot do alone".





# 6<sup>th</sup> Concept of NA Service

“Group conscience is the means by which we collectively invite the ongoing guidance of a Higher Power in making decisions. We apply the Sixth Concept when we pursue our own personal recovery with vigor, seeking that ongoing spiritual awakening which makes it possible for us to apply the principles of the program in all our affairs, including our service affairs. We apply the Sixth Concept when we listen not just to the words our fellow members speak, but to the spirit behind their words. We apply the Sixth Concept when we seek to do God’s will, not our own, and to serve others, not ourselves, in our service decisions. We apply the Sixth Concept in our groups, service boards, and committees when we invite a loving God to influence us before making service-related decisions.”

*Retrieved from 6<sup>th</sup> Concept for NA Service*

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# The Spiritual Principles of Consensus

*Inclusion*

*Open-mindedness*

*Empathy*

*Collaboration*

*Responsibility*

*Leadership*



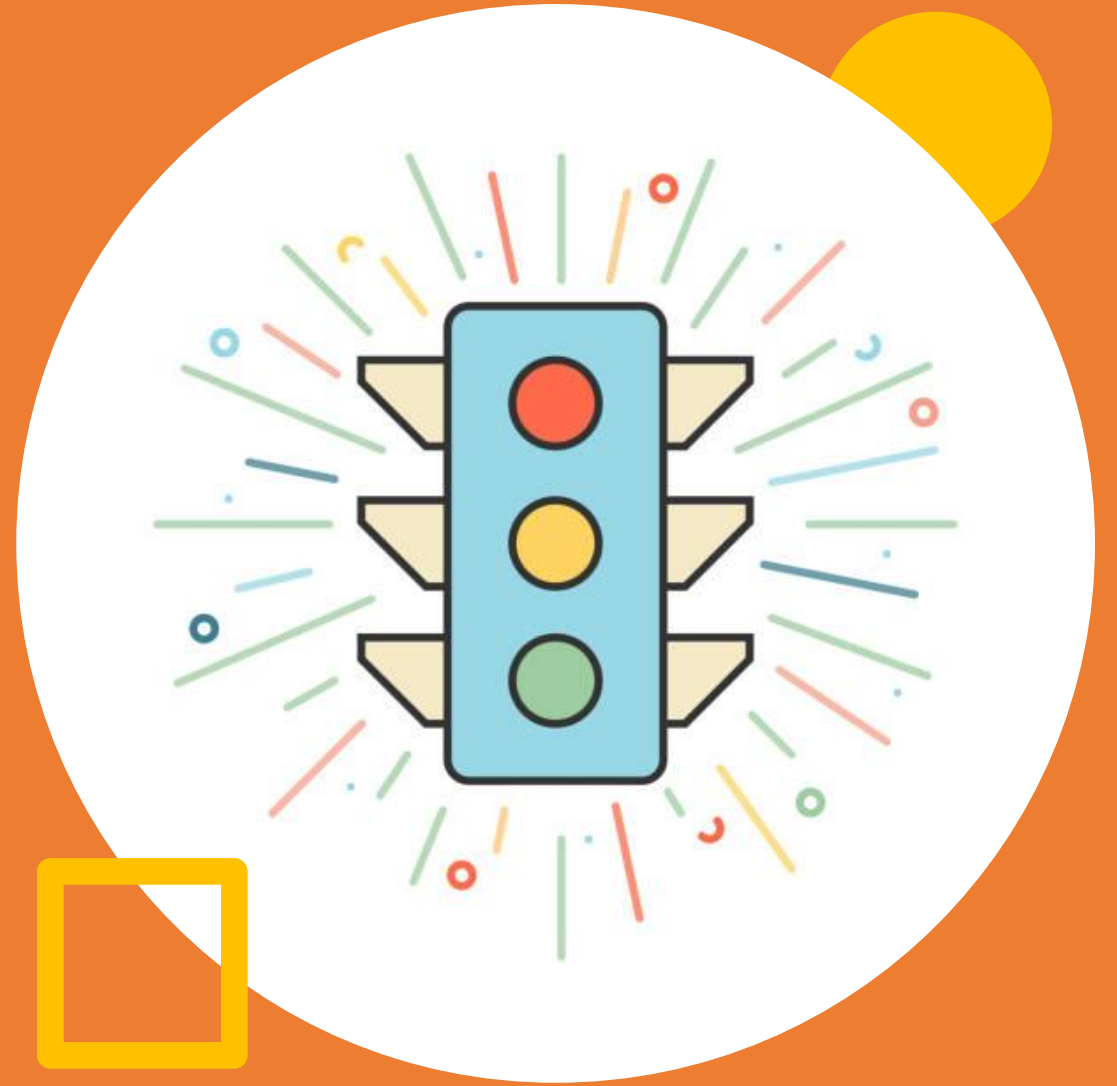
# How does CBDM work?

There are different variations of CBDM, but the basic steps are fairly consistent and simple to follow. Within those basic steps there is a great deal of variety depending on the individual service body's process and the type of decision being made.

The material in this section is intended to help service bodies understand how the basics of a consensus-based process work and can be adapted to fit local needs. Each NA community is free to create a process that works for them.



# The 3 consensus positions



# The 3 consensus positions:

- **GREEN:** Acceptance of the decision point. Accepting the decision point means agreeing with or hearing the discussion, having had the opportunity to participate in the process, and being able to support the decision.
- **YELLOW:** I have a reservation with the decision point but can rally. You are willing to discuss further but want to reiterate your reservations and/or suggest a new alternative.
- **RED:** You are not willing to accept this because you feel that this decision point is not consistent with our Traditions, Concepts, guidelines and/or the law.
- **STAND ASIDE:** Members who do not agree with the decision point. For example, they have a conflict of interest. The withdrawal is not counted.



**FACILITATOR**

# Role of the facilitator

CBDM requires a skillful facilitator who can guide the body in its decision-making process. A good facilitator can prevent a discussion from turning into an open sharing session and help everyone reach a decision they can all agree with in a timely manner. Facilitators may lead discussions, but they do not govern them.

The facilitator plays a major role in the consensus process. He must be very sensitive to the trends of the group conscience and is responsible for pointing out the direction of the group conscience and the issues raised by the participants. He must also seek the opinion of those who remain in the background for a true participation of the group conscience.

The effectiveness of consensus depends on the facilitator's ability to guide group consciousness through the process. The discussion must remain focused on the topic at hand and be timely. The facilitator must also ensure that all participants understand the process.





# Qualities of the facilitator

“Effective leadership is highly valued in Narcotics Anonymous. Leadership qualities should be carefully considered when selecting trusted servants.”

*4<sup>th</sup> Concept for NA Service*

Be familiar with the Concepts for NA Service, Traditions and guidelines.

Know the service body in which a decision must be made.

Understand the steps of the consensus-based decision-making process.

Have the patience and understanding that some decisions may take longer to make.

Inspire confidence in participating members of the group conscience.



# Tips for Facilitators

The role of the facilitator is to help a group or service body reach consensus on an issue. Certain actions are recommended to accomplish this:

- ✓ Invite a loving Higher Power into the process, often by opening the meeting with an NA prayer or a short extract from NA literature.
- ✓ Ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the process being used and the issue being discussed. This may include distributing relevant materials in advance of the discussion or making information available at the meeting.
- ✓ Help everyone to participate, including the quieter members in the room, and discourage mobilization of the discussion by one or two members.
- ✓ Listen for common ground and points of agreement and share these with the body.

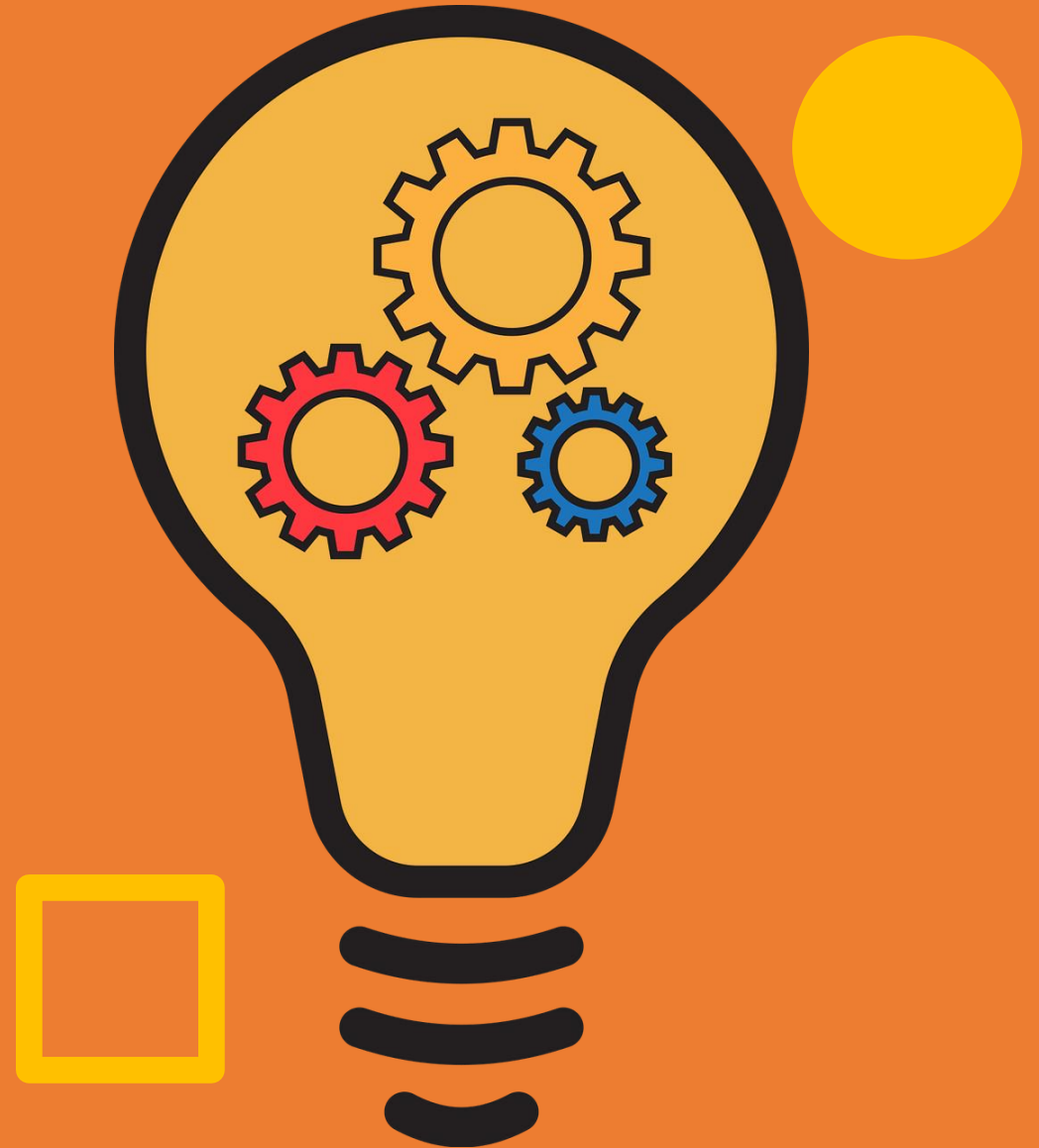




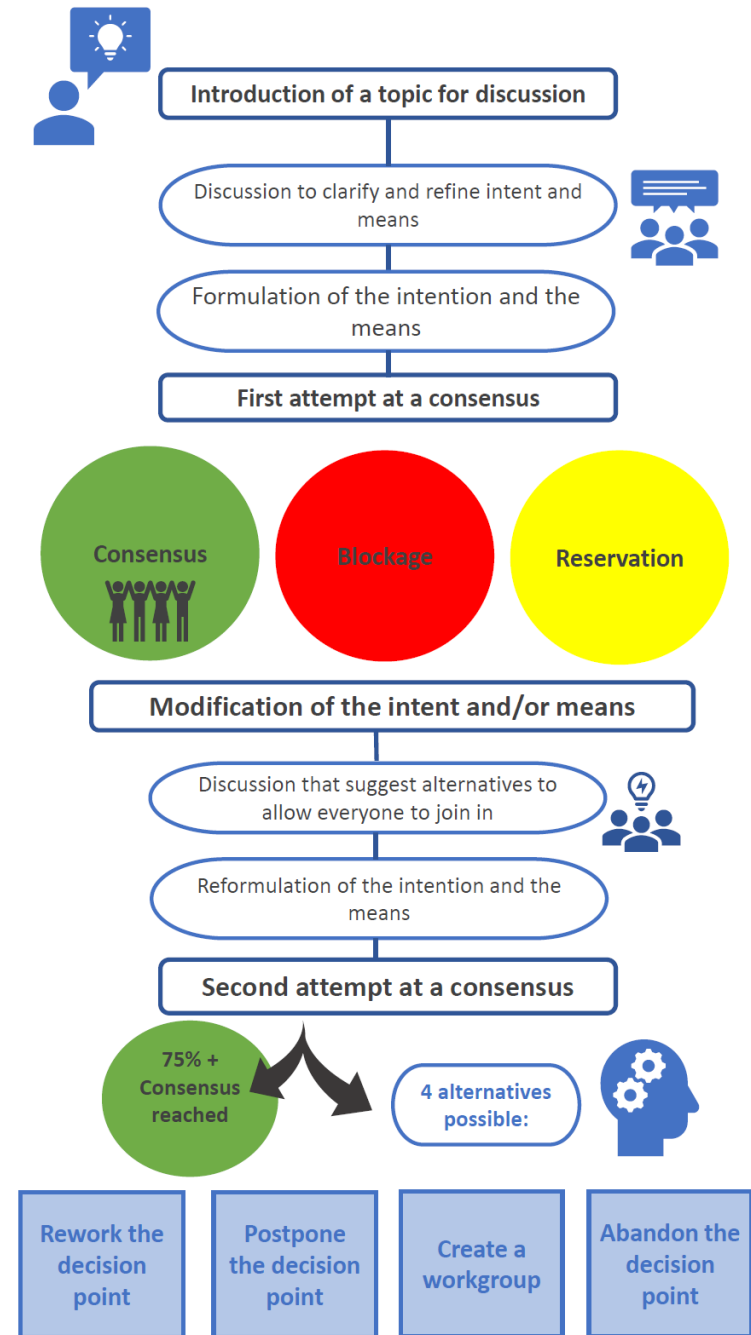
# Tips for Facilitators

- ✓ Repeat ideas that are shared to be sure everyone has a common understanding of them.
- ✓ Suggest ways to combine ideas to build consensus.
- ✓ Manage the time available and ensure enough time is given for the discussion.
- ✓ Keep the conversation focused and move it forward toward a decision when needed.
- ✓ Confirm that everyone has a clear understanding of decisions made and further actions required, and that these are archived.
- ✓ Have non-verbal language that demonstrates listening and remain enthusiastic and dynamic throughout the process.

The steps of the  
consensus-based  
decision-making  
process



# Scheme

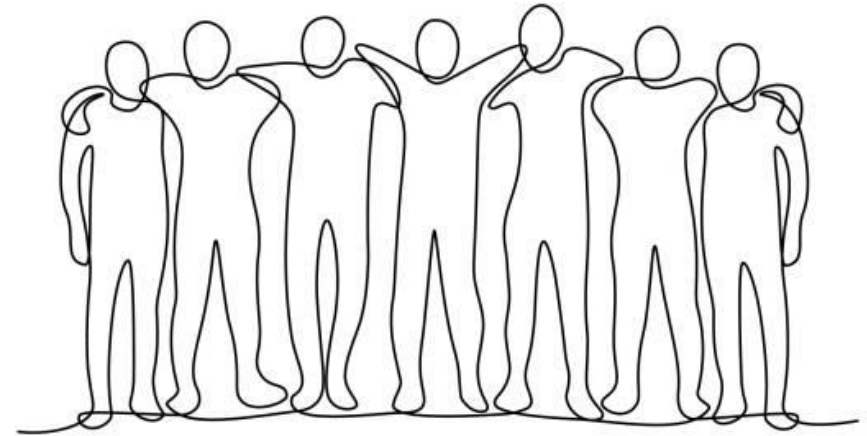


# 7<sup>th</sup> Concept of NA Service

The Seventh Concept is one way of putting the principle of group conscience to work in the service environment. This concept suggests that each service body should encourage all its members to participate in its decision-making process. By bringing their different perspectives together, we give our service bodies the opportunity to develop a fully informed, balanced group conscience leading to sound, sensitive service decisions.

Our service boards and committees represent a cross-section of NA perspective and experience. Each participant's contribution to the decision-making process is important.

*Retrieved from 7<sup>th</sup> Concept for NA Service*



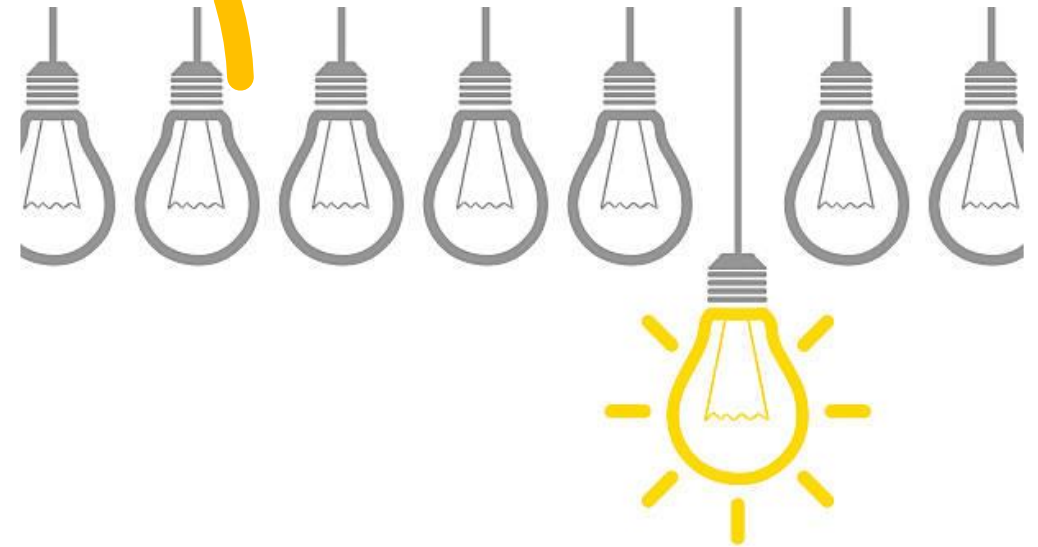
# Introduction of a topic for discussion

## Who can introduce a topic for discussion?

Any participating member can bring a topic to a meeting for discussion.

## When to introduce a topic for discussion?

It can be introduced through a report but can also be raised at any time during the meeting. However, the facilitator may move the discussion to another time in the meeting if he deems it appropriate.



# Discussion to clarify and specify the intention and the means

- We make sure we have the information on the subject that requires a decision.
- We are holding a discussion where differing opinions are welcome.
- We identify concerns and needs; we make sure to include these important points in the discussion.





# Formulation of the intention and the means

At this point, the facilitator can clearly name the decision point . This one is composed of:

- ❖ **Intention:** The specific objective/goal.
- ❖ **Means:** The financial, human and spiritual resources to achieve the intention.

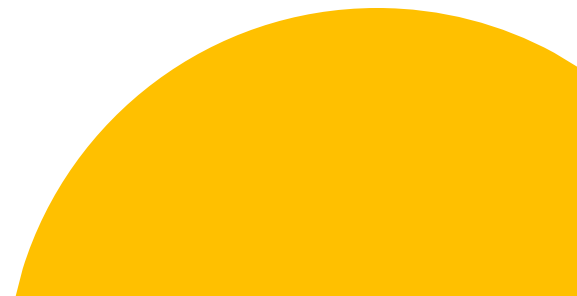
**IMPORTANT:** Before inviting the participating members to take a position, the facilitator should announce that if we do not reach consensus, a second discussion will allow those who still have reservations and those with other alternatives to speak in order to evolve the decision point.



# First attempt at a consensus

The participating members of the meeting should take a position on the decision point using the color system (green, yellow, red)

- ❖ If all participants present the “green”, there is consensus on the decision point.
- ❖ If there is a majority of green, it is clear that the subject is supported by the group, reservations and blockages will be heard in order to evolve the decision point.
- ❖ If there is a majority of yellow and/or red, it is clear that the topic is not supported by the group, the discussion can be stopped. (see alternatives)



“Our experience has shown us that the ideas of those who disagree with us are often the ones we need most to hear. The Ninth Concept puts this aspect of our recovery experience to work in the service environment. When making a decision, our groups, service boards, and committees should actively seek out all available viewpoints. An effective group conscience is a fully informed group conscience. The Ninth Concept is one tool we use to help ensure that our group conscience is as well-informed as it can possibly be. In any discussion, it is tempting to ignore dissenting members, especially if the vast majority of members think alike. Yet it is often the lone voice, offering new information or a unique perspective on things, that saves us from hasty or misinformed decisions. In Narcotics Anonymous, we are encouraged to respect that lone voice, to protect it, even to seek it out, for without it our service decisions would undoubtedly suffer.”

*Retrieved from 9<sup>th</sup> concept for NA service, p.11*



# Modification of the intent and/or means

At this point, a second discussion is necessary. Participants who are “yellow” or “red” should be heard. The goal is to get buy-in from the participating members by modifying the decision point, so that the details of the decision point become acceptable to all.



# Discussion that proposes alternatives to allow everyone to join in

The discussion continues, the direction becomes clearer and the group conscience agrees on the details, depending on the issues and questions raised by the participants.



# Reformulation of the intention and/or the means

Now that the blockages and/or reservations have been heard, the facilitator is able to restate the intent and means of the decision point.



# Second attempt at a consensus

The participating members must again take a position using the color system (green, yellow, red).

- ❖ If at least 75% of the participants show the color “green”, then the decision point is ratified by consensus.
- ❖ If not, 4 alternatives are possible...



# 4 alternatives

- Rework the decision point and the steps in the consensus process will then be repeated.
- Postpone the decision point to allow for reflection.
- Create a workgroup to bring together the experience of the members to come up with answers and solutions. The mandate of this workgroup should be clearly named.
- Abandon the decision point.





# Checklist

Robert's Rules of order (Morin code)	Consensus
Vote	Position/take position/accept (with or without reservation) or not accept
Debate	Discussion, exchange, reflection (together)
New/ongoing business, proposal	Topic for discussion, decision point
Proposer, seconder	Participating members
Quorum (decisions/elections)	The consensus does not require a quorum, it takes place in group conscience composed of the trusted servants present. We use "quorum" only for elections.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ?

