Consensus Decision Making Guide

Definition
Unicorn Grocery practices proposal-led consensus for formal decisions taken in our General Meeting. We practice consensus minus two, requiring three members to block a proposal in order for it not to pass. Not everyone will agree 100% with decisions taken - consensus decisions are decisions that members can live with.

Proposal Templates
To ensure the membership has sufficient information to make a decision, we require all General Meeting proposals to be put forward using the relevant proposal template (below).

The Facilitator
Every meeting needs a facilitator who acts impartially, ensures all voices are heard and helps the group to reach consensus within agreed time constraints. With controversial issues this can be a demanding role, and occasionally external facilitation may be used.

Proposal Discussions
If during the discussion of a proposal it becomes clear that there is a high level of confusion over its wording and/or intent, the facilitator may call a break to consult with those bringing the proposal forward to decide whether or not it should be withdrawn to be rewritten in a more appropriate sized group.

Consensus Positions
There are four positions a member can take on any given proposal:
- Active Agreement ('I am in active agreement with the proposal')
- Agreement with Reservations ('I am in broad agreement with the proposal but I have one or more reservations')
- Non-Support ('I do not support the proposal as I have unresolved objections, but I do not wish to block it because I can live with it')
- Block ('I cannot live with this proposal')

What if everyone 'agrees with reservations' or quite a number express their 'non-support'?
If a proposal is not blocked then it will pass. However, if during the meeting there are many members expressing strong concerns which are unresolved after a period of discussion, then the proposal may be withdrawn for further development (at the discretion of the facilitator(s) in consultation with those bringing it forward) before it reaches the stage of formal consensus testing.

What if the proposal is blocked?
When Unicorn had fewer members, a single objection or 'block' would stop a proposal going through; with 70+ members this has increased to three members (roughly 5% of the membership) needed to block a MM proposal. There are two options in case of a block:
1. The proposers may withdraw the original proposal for further development
2. The proposal may go to a workshop

When is it appropriate to block a proposal?
All members have the right to block a proposal if they feel that they cannot live with the proposed change. Reasons for blocking a proposal include (but are not limited to) believing it to be:
- in conflict with our Principles of Purpose
- detrimental to the viability of the business
- detrimental to the operations of the co-op
- detrimental to the wellbeing of members

Members choosing to use a block have the responsibility to share their reasons during the meeting before we formally test for consensus. This is important when practising consensus because it allows other members to respond, and potentially for collective solutions to be found which address the stated concerns. It is also important to think carefully whether registering non-support would be a more appropriate way to express concerns.

What happens if we need a workshop?
Workshops can be one of the great strengths of consensus decision making; the collaborative proposals that result from workshops can be better than the original proposal. After the meeting at which a proposal is blocked, the Secretary publicises the date and time for the workshop. Interested parties – at least the members behind the original proposal and those who blocked it – attend the workshop to discuss the issue. Usually this group agrees to an alternate proposal and resolves most concerns. Members who do not attend are informally expected to accept the outcome of the workshop, however any new proposal must still be brought back to a Members' Meeting or EGM for formal agreement.

If workshop participants are unable to consent to the original or an amended version of the proposal, then the proposers will decide which version returns to the membership, either:
- The original version of the proposal
- An amended version based on workshop discussions

After the workshop a is taken whether to call an EGM or take the proposal to the next General Meeting to agree the outcome.

What happens if after the workshop the proposal is still blocked?
If in the meeting following the workshop the proposal is still blocked then a vote will be taken. This requires a supermajority decision – 75% or more of members present must vote in favour of the proposal for it to pass.

Policy Proposal Template

> ## Policy Proposals
>
> **A) Proposal Title:** (for agenda)
>
> **B) Names & Circle bringing proposal forward:**
>
> **C) Proposal - Suggested New Policy Wording:** " …."
>
> **D) Existing Policy Wording** The existing policy reads "..."
>
> **E) Rationale & Impact:** (The reason why the policy change proposal is being brought forward, and the impact you expect the policy change to have on the business or members)
>
> **F) Cost:** (Breakdown of any costs the policy change will incur if it is passed)
>
> **G) Implementation:** (How will the policy change be implemented?)
>
> **H) Measures and Review Date:** (How will we know if the intended outcome of the policy change has been achieved? When will it be reviewed?)
>
> **I) Background:** (Any relevant background information relating to this proposal)
>
> **J) How urgent is the discussion of this proposal?** (Could it wait until the next meeting if necessary?)

Non-Policy Proposal Template

> ## Non-Policy Proposals
>
> **A) Proposal Title:** (for agenda)
>
> **B) Proposal -** "To…"
>
> **C) Rationale & Desired Outcome:** (Why the proposal is being brought forward, and what you hope it will achieve)
>
> **D) Cost:** (Breakdown of any costs the proposal will incur if it is passed, and which budget line)
>
> **E) Implementation:** (How will this be implemented, and by whom?)
>
> **F) Measures and Review Date:** (How will we know if the proposal achieved what it set out to do? When will it be reviewed?)
>
> **G) Background:** (Any relevant background information relating to this proposal)
>
> **H) How urgent is the discussion of this proposal?** (Could it wait until the next meeting if necessary?)