

Steps in Creating a Consensus Process

1. **Frame the issue**

Participants in a consensus process must know what it is they are discussing. A common understanding of the issue – its location, the extent, the impacts – is necessary before proceeding. It is helpful to frame the issue in terms of a question to initiate discussion:

Focus Question: “What strategies can we employ to promote safety of youth in our community?”

2. **Establish agreements**

Group agreements are essential to any productive group process. Agreements, or ground rules, will be both process-oriented and task-oriented. Examples of process agreements include how group members will behave toward one another. Task-oriented or procedural agreements will include how information will be shared, how a decision will be made, and who will participate in decision-making.

3. **Gather information**

Participants will identify key issues, interests, and relevant data as related to the issue. Task groups can be formed to investigate different aspects of an issue and then report back to the entire group. The goal of the information gathering stage is to gain a collective understanding of an issue and to begin identifying common ground.

4. **Generate options**

Participants generate options, or alternative solutions to an issue. Task groups may be formed to generate solutions to a particular aspect of an issue.

5. **Reach agreements**

Participants reach agreement by combining, synthesizing, and compromising. The final solution(s) is one that “everyone can live with.” The outcome should feel like a “win-win” situation. This is the time to focus on common ground and “interests, not positions.” It is essential that each participant conclude the decision-making process with at least some needs met and with a sense of shared values and common ground.

6. **Implement and monitor solutions**

Time for the group to “walk its talk!” The group is responsible for an implementation plan including group agreements and plan for monitoring progress and outcomes.