A Checklist for the Consensus Process

These are just some of the many ways to conduct a meeting using the consensus process. Roles should be carried out by everyone as needed — not just the person specially designated.

**Basic Procedure**

**Before the meeting (or at previous meeting):**
Choose facilitator(s)
Gather agenda items
Determine presenter/initiator for each item
Determine item type: announcement, report, discussion, decision
Bring materials/supplies needed

**At the meeting:**
Connect (game, song, ritual, etc.)
Check-in/excitement-sharing
Agenda review: agree on order and time
Choose notetaker, timekeeper, vibeswatcher
Step through the agenda
Set next meeting
Evaluation (good, bad, better)
Closing (game, song, ritual, etc.)

**The Flow of a Cooperative Decision-Making Process**
Issue raised — what is the problem?
Clarify problem — put it in context
Discuss, bring out a diversity of ideas, concerns, and perspectives — look at possible solutions and the problems with those solutions
Encourage heartfelt dissent and challenge
Note agreements and disagreements and the underlying reasons for them — discuss those underlying reasons
Synthesize proposed ideas/solutions or come up with totally new ideas in the supportive atmosphere of the meeting (find a “third way”)
Evaluate the different ideas until one idea seems right for the group
Establish how the decision will be implemented
Make sure there are no loose ends
Restate the decision for the notetaker (including implementation)

**Discussion/Problem-Solving Tools**
Brainstorms
Go around the circle
Small-group discussion (3-7 people)
Advantages/disadvantages chart
Visual aids
Visible notes
Goals-/priorities-setting techniques
Challenges/devil’s advocate questions

**Process/Empowerment Tools**
Participation equalizers (pebbles, etc.)
Active listening in pairs
Support groups/caucuses
Feelings sharing
Fishbowls
Role plays

**Typical Tasks of Facilitator(s)**
Helps formulate agenda
Helps establish a hopeful, upbeat, and safe atmosphere
Helps group work through decisions:
Asks for clarification
Summarizes and sorts discussion — lists threads of thought, agreements, and disagreements
Helps focus and order discussion topics
Brings out all viewpoints
Restates final decisions
Encourages equal participation
Draws out quiet people
Asks windy speakers to be brief
Encourages everyone to perform leadership tasks
Calls on speakers
Stays neutral while facilitating

**Typical Tasks of a Vibeswatcher (“Caretaker”)**
Watches the process of the meeting
Notices underlying feelings from tone of voice and body language, points out tension and weariness, recommends changes
Stops bad process (domineering, guilt-tripping, interrupting, put-downs, bulldozing, defensiveness, space-outs, etc.)
Helps resolve conflicts
Helps work out negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, hopelessness)
Suggests tools to improve meetings
Helps create a safe, accepting tone
Deals with outside distractions

**Stress-Reduction Techniques**
Stretch breaks/cooperative games
Singing
Humor
Affirmations
Feelings sharing
Silence (mediation, prayer)
Calm voice
Eye contact
Breathing (deep)
Back rubs

**Conflict Resolution Tools**
Appreciations/affirmations
Active listening
I-messages
Restating other’s viewpoint
Six-step problem solving technique
Support groups
Venting emotions somewhere else
Gripe sessions
Resentment sharing
Fishbowls

— Edited by Randy Schutt, P.O. Box 608867, Cleveland, OH 44108 <http://www.vernalproject.org>. OK to copy for non-commercial purposes.