

Decision Making Methods for Group Work

In order to make the jump from generating ideas for solving a problem to implementing solutions, group members need to make decisions. There are several possible methods of decision making that a group may use. A few of them are briefly described below, with advantages on the left and disadvantages on the right for each one:

Decision-making by authority	
The group generates ideas and holds open discussions, but the final decision is made by one person.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate when there is a clear expert in the topic at hand • Very fast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not maximize the strengths of the individuals in the group • The group may not be dedicated to implementing a decision made by one person
Decision-making by majority	
The group holds a vote on a particular issue following some period of discussion and the majority wins.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses democratic participation in the process • Fast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyranny of the majority often overwhelms minority views, perhaps encouraging factionalism
Decision-making by negative minority	
The group holds a vote for the most unpopular idea, eliminating it, and voting again until only one idea is left.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic • Useful when there are many ideas and few voters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members may feel resentful at having their ideas voted as unpopular • Slow
Decision-making by consensus	
Decision is discussed and negotiated until everyone affected by it understands and agrees with what will be done.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members feel that they have had an equal opportunity to influence the decision, and will continue to support the group • The best way to make decisions, if you have the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to reach a consensus • May be very time consuming
Decision-making by unanimity	
All group members must agree that the decision is the best one.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group members know that they won't have to do anything they don't approve of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unanimous agreement may be impossible to reach

Nominal Group Technique (NGT)	
<p>NGT typically includes four steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silent generation of ideas in writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants independently write down their responses to a stimulus question 2. Round-robin recording of ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one at a time, each participant contributes a single idea that is recorded on a board; discussion of the ideas is not permitted; process continues until there are no more ideas 3. Discussion of the list of ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants discuss each idea on the list so that they are clear about the meaning of the ideas 4. Voting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participants individually write down 5 ideas they like best • they rank each idea from 1 to 5, with 5 being the best • votes are recorded on the board and totaled • the idea with the highest total is selected 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful in identifying problems, exploring solutions, and establishing priorities • Includes a voting procedure and, therefore, gives the impression that the final decision represents a group consensus • The final product consists of a decision and a list of the ideas generated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to generate the appropriate stimulus question • Not suitable for all questions • Takes time
Combining ideas	
<p>Instead of dropping one idea in favor of another, the group searches for possibilities of implementing both or combining them into one solution.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either/or decisions are avoided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation may take longer since more than one idea is being considered
Evaluating using criteria	
<p>List and agree on criteria for a successful solution. Evaluate alternatives against criteria.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives an objective measure of the quality of a solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to come up with appropriate criteria

For more detailed descriptions, see the TRACE Tips Sheet “[Group Decision Making](#).”

*(Adapted from **Working in Small Groups: How to Do It Better** by Bill Shalinsky and Scott Snider, **Group Techniques for Idea Building** by Carl Moore)*