

Lucid Facilitator's Guide

A PROCESS FOR DEFINING DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA

by Beatrice Briggs

Decision-making can easily devolve into arguments for and against the personal preferences of those involved in the process.

To avoid this common trap BEFORE presenting proposals, make a plan for getting to a final decision that everyone can support. Establishing the criteria by which the proposed options will be evaluated helps everyone look at these options more objectively. Including this step can save time and improve the quality of final decision.

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AVOID THE BATTLES THAT DERAIL DECISION-MAKING

One of the most important reasons for holding a meeting is to make decisions. Yet too often the decision-making process degenerates into a battle between competing points of view.

This dismal scenario can be avoided by adding one step to the decision-making process: **define criteria for evaluating proposed solutions.**

Example:

Criteria for deciding where to hold the annual directors meeting.

- Cost of transportation to the venue not to exceed \$\$\$ (specified amount)
- Venue must be accessible for people in wheelchairs
- The organization must have an existing project or a local partner in the location.

Focusing on these specifications lifts the discussion out of the realm of random, personal preferences (“Let’s go to Miami”) and into a thoughtful consideration of options.

This discussion helps eliminate options that do not meet the criteria and often sparks new ideas that combine elements of various proposals.

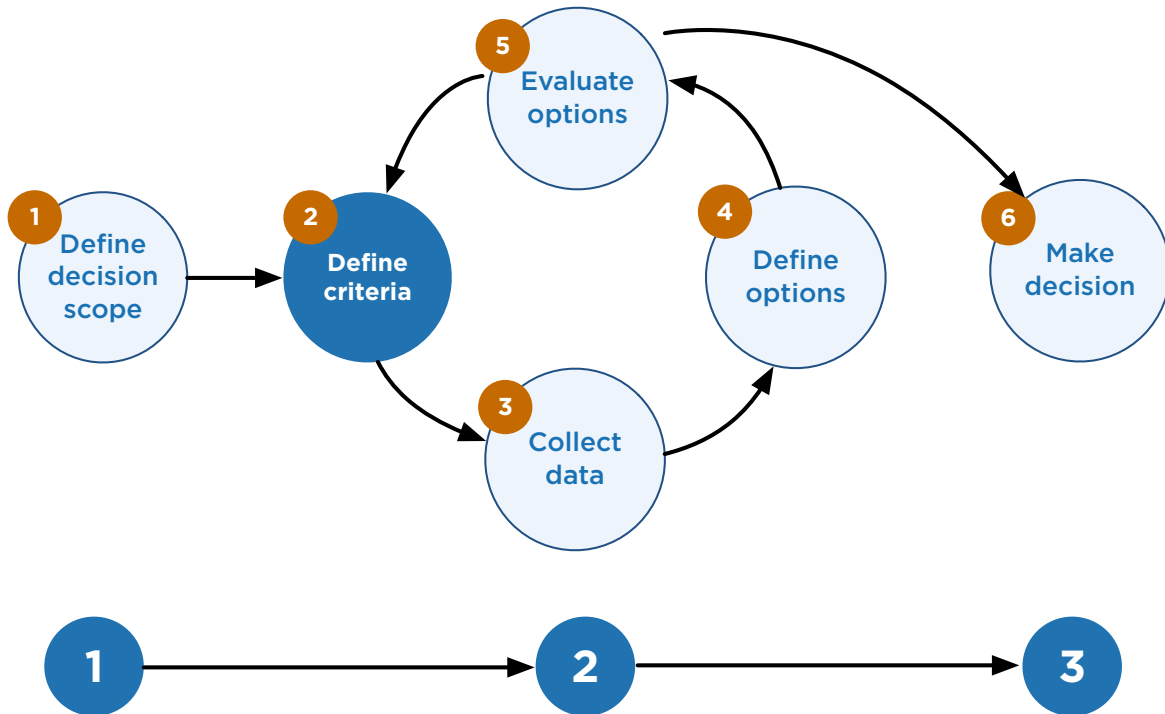
When to Establish Criteria

Usually the criteria are set early in the decision-making process and then applied when evaluating the options before making the final decision.



A Model Process for Decision Making

Here is a model for an effective decision-making process that includes the development and use of criteria.



This model is divided into 3 phases:

1. Define the problem and scope of the decision to be taken.
2. Research and evaluate options (applying the decision criteria).
3. Decide.

Steps 2, 3, 4 and 5 can occur in any order. Often it is necessary to repeat some of these steps in order to make a solid decision.

In the meeting described here, the group makes many decisions before reaching the final step.

1. What is the scope of the decision to be made?
2. What information do we need in order to generate options?
3. What criteria does the final decision need to meet?

Having a clearly defined, participatory process invites the co-creation of solutions, avoids battles based solely on personal preferences, ensures that the final decision fulfills basic requirements and makes it easier to justify the final decision to other stakeholders.



THE AGENDA

Goal

To reach agreement on the process to be used for making a final decision.

Desired Outcomes

Decisions on:

- The scope of the decision to be made
- The information required to make the decision
- The criteria for evaluating proposed solutions
- Next steps

Duration

1.5 - 2 Hours

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review Background Information
- 3 Present the Decision-Making Model
- 4 Define Decision Scope
- 5 Identify the Information Needed
- 6 Draft Criteria
- 7 Closing and Next Steps



Example Results

For a Business

Decision Scope: Hire a new executive director

Information Needed	Decision Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start date • Salary range • Hiring process (ask HR) • Specific skills needed (consult new strategic plan) • Relocation budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available to start on the specified date • Experience leading organizational change • Demonstrated multi-cultural skills

For the Public Sector

Decision Scope: Plan to address opioid addiction in our city

Information Needed	Decision Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data about the current number/profile of addicts • Experiences in other cities • Available funding sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced approach: focus on both prevention and treatment • Builds on our current network of service providers

For a Family

Decision Scope: Where to go on vacation this year

Information Needed	Decision Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When (dates) • Who is going, how many travelers • Preferred activities – things to do • Airline miles/hotel points available • Past experiences (positive and negative) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place none of us have even visited • Of historical /cultural interest • Pet friendly

Note: The full meeting record should also include attendance information, action items, and any key points raised.



STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Before the Meeting

Preparation

The meeting leader should prepare a summary of the background related to the decision that can be included with invitations.

Include the written summary prepared by the leader and a description of the decision-making model with the meeting invitations.

Scheduling

Schedule the meeting 7 to 10 days in advance. This will give everyone time to read the decision background information and the overview of the decision-making model.

You will also need to reserve a large conference room or collaborative online meeting software.

Equipment Needed

Face-to-Face Meeting	Virtual and/or Hybrid Meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whiteboard• Easel paper (6 sheets)• Markers and masking tape• 6"x8" Post it notes (or letter size sheets of paper cut in half)• Laptop for recording decisions taken and action items	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internet connection• Meeting software for collaborating on notes, capturing brainstorming ideas, writing action items, and voting on top priorities



During the Meeting

1

Introduction

Purpose	Help people transition into the meeting and get to know one another, confirm the agenda
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone knows who is on the call/in the meeting room and the plan for the meeting• People are ready to begin the work of the meeting
Duration	5 minutes for greetings and agenda review, + 1 minute per person for introductions

Instructions

Welcome everyone to the meeting. State the purpose of the meeting, then start introductions.

Ask each person to share:

1. Their name
2. Their role on this project
3. The number one thing they want to accomplish or learn during the meeting.

Introduce yourself first to provide an example.

Then, once everyone has been introduced, quickly review and update the agenda as needed. Ask:

“Based on what we’ve heard everyone wants to accomplish today, do we need to make any changes to the agenda?”



2

Review Background Information

Purpose	Clarify the factors that contributed to the need to make the decision in question and why it is important to deal with this issue now
Outcomes	Shared understanding of the antecedents and urgency of the issue
Duration	5 minutes (assuming that participants have read the background summary)

Instructions

Verify that all the participants have received and read the background summary that was provided as input for this meeting.

If there are one or two who have not read the summary, explain where they can find a copy but do not take time to explain it to them now.

Ask those who have read the document if there are any clarifying questions about the contents, i.e., any points that were unclear. You (or the person who wrote the summary) provide the needed clarification.

Finally, say:

“If there are no more clarifying questions about why we need to address this issue now, let’s move on to planning the decision-making process.

NOTE: Now and throughout the meeting, remind the group that their task in this meeting is not to discuss or decide solutions to issue at hand, but rather to make decisions about the process that will lead to making the “big” decision in the future.



3

Present the Decision-Making Model

Purpose	To clarify any points of confusion
Outcome	Shared understanding of how the final decision will be made
Duration	5 to 10 minutes

Instructions

Share the decision-making process described [on page 3](#). Explain that this model was developed by the [International Association for Public Participation](#) as a guide for making decisions that involve multiple stakeholders and/or controversial issues.

By clearly defining each step, this process helps the decision makers to identify opportunities for involving different stakeholders and also provides them with a clear explanation of how the final decision was reached.

For example, you might say:

“By adopting this model, we will be able to move forward in an orderly way and make a decision that we can support and that is likely to be implemented.

Today we are going to address three important first steps in this process:

1. Define the scope of the decision,
2. Define the information needed to make a sound decision and
3. Define the criteria for evaluating options for solving the problem.”

Answer any clarifying questions.

Ask permission to move on to defining the scope.



4

Define Decision Scope

Purpose	Clarify exactly what issue(s) the decision must address
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on the decision scope • Decision whether anyone else (besides those in the meeting) needs to be informed of the decision scope. • If necessary, assign the task of informing others.
Duration	10-20 minutes depending on level of controversy involved.

Instructions

Explain what it means to determine scope. For example, you might say:

“The background information points to the need to address [broad topic]. In order to focus our planning for future discussions, let’s take a few minutes to define the scope of the decision to be made. This will prevent us from getting lost in a sea of other issues that, while important, are not our immediate concern.

For example, if the broad issue we face is “trash”, are we being asked to decide on a location for a new landfill or a strategy to reduce solid waste in the community?

Being specific about the scope of the decision will concentrate our efforts and help clarify to other stakeholders what problem we are trying to solve.”

Then, lead the group through a discussion to clarify the scope of this decision.

Suggested Process

1. Individual reflection.

Ask all participants to take a moment to think on their own about what the scope of the decision is.



4

continued

2. In pairs, share scope ideas.

(If there are an uneven number of people in the meeting, have one group of 3). Help each other refine these ideas. (Note: do not try to reach a decision, just make the respective proposals as clear as possible.) Write each “scope proposal” on a large post-it or sheet of paper.

3. Share draft scope proposals.

In plenary, ask each group member to come forward, read their “scope proposal” and place it on the whiteboard. If the idea is similar or identical to another one, group them together.

4. Ask the group to reflect on the results.

- What words or phrases stand out for you?
- Are there any surprises? Unexpected ideas?
- Which of these best expresses your understanding of the decision scope?

5. Select a scope.

Based on the feedback from the group, identify the decision scope that seems to have the most support. Ask for any suggestions about how to refine the wording. Write the emerging text where everyone can see it.

6. Establish consensus.

Read the scope proposal out loud and take a “Fist to 5” poll. (See next page.) If the group is not familiar with the “Fist to 5” procedure, briefly explain.

7. Continue to refine the text as needed.

8. Read the final version.

Congratulate the group for taking this important first step in the process design.

9. Decide who else needs to know.

If anyone else besides those in the meeting needs to be informed of the scope of the decision, assign the task of informing other stakeholders about the scope.





No way!
I'll block this.

I see **MAJOR**
issues we need
to resolve.

I see **MINOR**
issues we need
to resolve now.

I see minor
issues we can
resolve later.

I'm fine with
this as it is.

I love this!
I will champion it.

Lack of Consensus

Consensus

5 fingers	I love this! I will work to champion this.
4 fingers	I am fine with this; no worries.
3 fingers	I have a minor issue that can be worked out later. I can live with and support it.
2 fingers	I have some minor issues that feel resolvable and then I can live with and will support it.
1 finger	I have major issues. They may be resolvable but will probably need some additional work outside of this meeting.
Closed fist	No way! I cannot let this decision go forward no matter what. The issues are so extreme I cannot see any possible resolution.

Note: There are many ways to define the levels in the Fist to Five. This is the version that Lucid Meetings publishes in meeting templates. Please use the version that makes the best sense for your group.



5

Identify the Information Needed

Purpose	Clarify the information needed prior to making the decision. Consider what sources will be seen as reliable/credible and will represent diverse points of view on the issue
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on the information needed • Assign team members to compile the information.
Duration	10-15 minutes

Instructions

Ask:

“In order to make a decision on [the issue at hand] what information do we need?”

Go around the group and ask each person to suggest one piece of information needed. Write each item on a large post-it (or online document). Keep going around until all ideas have been recorded and numbered.

Cluster the ideas that have something in common (e.g., same source, related topics, etc.)

Name each cluster (e.g., financial, geographic, demographic, legal, etc.)

Identify potential sources for this information, including those that might present diverse points of view.

Action Item: Assign a small team to assemble the information and report on progress at next meeting.



6

Draft Criteria

Purpose	Define the principles or standards by which proposed solutions will be evaluated. Identify any constraints that need to be taken into consideration.
Outcome	Draft list of criteria
Duration	30 minutes

Instructions

Introduce this step. For example, you might say:

“The final step in today’s agenda is to draft criteria to use when we evaluate the proposed solutions for [the decision to be made].

The dictionary definition of criterion is “a principle or standard by which something may be judged or decided”. (Criteria is the plural form.)

In order to be useful in a group decision-making process, the criteria need to be external, objective, verifiable references that can lift the discussion out of the realm of personal preferences and entrenched positions.

Let’s look at an example of a pending decision about where to hold the annual directors meeting. Criteria might include:

- Cost of transportation to the venue not to exceed \$\$\$ (specified amount)
- Venue must be accessible for people in wheelchairs
- The organization has an existing project or a local partner in the location.

By taking time now to identify the principles or standards that we will consider before making the final decision about scope of the decision], we will avoid will battles arising from our personal preferences and make a decision that we can defend on objective standards.

Any clarifying questions before we begin to define the criteria?”



Process

1. Brainstorm.

Prompt: “Imagine that we are about to evaluate the options presented for the [decision scope]. What are the first questions you might have about each option? This is an initial brainstorm, so all questions are welcome!” Write all the questions where the group can see them.

2. Turn questions into criteria.

Each participant selects one question and turns it into a criterion.

For example, if a question is “How much will this cost?,” the criterion might be “The cost should not exceed \$5,000 USD.”

3. Participants share their draft criteria.

4. Group similar criteria and refine.

Assigned clusters to teams of 2-3 participants who verify that each one is an external, objective, verifiable reference—not a personal opinion nor a preferred solution—and look for ways to combine one or more of the ideas.

5. Teams present the revised criteria to the whole group.

6. Reflect on the results.

- *If there are 5 or fewer proposed criteria*, the leader asks, “Can we agree to accept these criteria, subject to future revision, if necessary?” Use the Fist to 5 poll.
- *If there are more than five criteria*, use dot voting to identify preferences. (See next page.) Identify the 5 criteria that received the highest number of dots and ask if the group is willing to accept these criteria, subject to future revision, if necessary. Use the Fist to 5 poll.

Note: If some seem uneasy with the criteria, remind them that if new information or changing circumstances suggest that one or more of the criteria needs to change, modifications may be made before evaluating the proposed solutions. Meanwhile, the criteria just approved will provide guidance for those developing proposals.

7. Record the criteria.

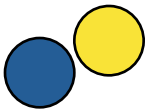


CORE TOOL: DOT VOTING



What Is It?

Dot-voting is a fast and easy voting system for determining the highest priority items on a list. The technique is called “Dot Voting,” because in face-to-face meetings, votes are cast by placing a sticky-dot or using markers to make a dot next to an item pasted on the wall.



How it Works

After assembling a list of options, the group starts a dot-vote to determine which few high-priority items to focus on.

The leader will share any criteria that participants should keep in mind when placing votes, then ask participants to cast their votes.

Each person gets a fixed number of votes (or dots) that they can cast however they want; they can place all their votes on the same item if they wish, or vote for several different items. This allows participants to vote for multiple options, and reveals relative priorities rather than declaring any single item a “winner.”

Everyone votes at once.

After participants place all their dots, the leader counts the dots to identify the preferred options. The color of the dots does not matter. The items with the most dots rank highest.



How many dots should each person get?

Everyone needs enough dots to vote on multiple items. This makes it possible to express relative priorities by putting more dots on one item about which one feels strongly. You also need to ensure that when voting concludes, the group will see a clear set of priorities.

To ensure a clear result, **the number of allowed votes can be no more than 30% of the available options.** For example, if the list contains 12 items, each person would have no more than 4 votes to cast.

To keep it simple, many teams use 3 dots per participant every time.



7

Closing and Next Steps

Purpose	Review the decisions reached and action steps assigned in points 4-6 of the agenda
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of the final decision defined • Information needs defined and team assigned to compile the data • List of criteria
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

To close the meeting, review with the group:

- The agreed-upon decision scope
- The list of information needed
- The list of criteria
- All assignments

Each item should be written where the group can see it. Ask:

- Is this captured correctly?
- Is there anything we should add or change to help us and others understand what we meant when we use these notes later?
- Are the action items clear enough that we will recognize when each one is complete?
- Are the action item due dates realistic?

Finally, give everyone a moment to offer any appreciations they'd like to share and acknowledge the good work the group just completed.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This template was designed by Beatrice Briggs.

Beatrice Briggs helps leaders and teams eliminate boring, unproductive meetings, organization-wide.

Founder and Director of the International Institute for Facilitation and Change, a consulting firm based in Mexico, she has been facilitating and training groups in participatory processes since the 1990's.

She works in both English and Spanish and has served clients in 30 countries. A native of the United States, Beatrice has been living in Mexico since 1998.

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Additional Resources Available from Lucid Meetings

Beatrice Brigg's Work with Lucid Meetings

- [Blog Posts and Meeting Designs by Beatrice Briggs](#)

Meeting School Resources

- [40+ Sample Agendas with Facilitator's Guides](#)
- [The Lucid Guide to Decision Making Meetings](#)
- [The 16 Types of Business Meetings](#)
- [The Meeting Performance Maturity Model](#)
- [How to Structure Effective Meetings](#)
- [How to Create Meeting Agendas](#)
- [How often should you meet?](#)
- [What goes into a meeting invitation?](#)
- [What goes into meeting notes?](#)
- [Glossary of Meeting Terms](#)



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