Lucid Facilitator's Guide

STRUCTURES FOR MAKING DECISIONS WITH A GROUP

There are many ways to build group alignment and commitment to decisions. This guide introduces five basic approaches: Consensus, Consent, Compromise, Counting Votes, and Consultation.

Then, you'll find three detailed agendas with step-by-step instructions for leading the group through conversations using different decision making structures.

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INTRODUCTION

An effective meeting should build alignment and commitment to decisions.

Different approaches to reaching decisions can be more or less useful for achieving this alignment and commitment. Unfortunately, some leaders don't make a conscious choice about how decisions in a meeting will be made, and those that do know which decision method they'll use often don't explain their choice to meeting participants.

This lack of clarity can create problems.

For example, participants may assume they are simply providing input to the leader's decision, while the leader assumes s/he is gaining their complete support. **This confusion can lead to inappropriate expectations, difficult conversations, and poor results.**

This becomes even more of a problem during virtual meetings, where there is little-to-no ability to receive nonverbal feedback when the leader presumes a decision was reached.

To avoid these problems, plan the approach to use for each decision in advance of the meeting. Communicate this to all participants at the beginning of the discussion.

- Some situations call for a combination of approaches. For example, a meeting may require a formal vote "for the record," but this vote could be a last step after the group has reached a decision by some other means (i.e., consensus, consent, or compromise).
- Sometimes you may want to have a back-up method of decision-making in case your initial choice becomes unworkable in the meeting itself.

The Five C's: Approaches to Decision Making

The five basic approaches to reaching a decision with a group are:

- **Consensus**
  Set the expectation that the group will develop a common conclusion which all will support. If one person has an objection, then you don't have consensus. You may plan to agree to disagree by separating areas of consensus agreement from areas of disagreement, respecting the latter areas as "not (yet) agreed."

- **Consent**
  Explain that in reaching consent, everyone should comment on the decision. Each person indicates whether s/he supports it or has a fundamental concern that this decision will have a negative impact on something critical to his/her responsibilities or customers. Explain that by consenting to some decision, each person is saying that s/he can live with the decision. It does not have to be perfect, but "good enough."

- **Compromise**
  Everyone gives up something s/he wants to achieve a unified common outcome. The decision is good enough for everyone, although some may say that they wish it had been somewhat different.

- **Counting votes**
  This is decision by majority rule. The decision is reached in favor of the alternative or proposal that receives the most votes. Some win and some lose. While presumably simple to use, this approach poses challenges for effective deliberation and building alignment.

- **Consult**
  Here you ask for the group's input to shape some decision you are about to make. You propose a decision and then gather the group's reactions. Be clear about your process and how much influence the group's comments are likely to have on your final decision. This is an effective approach when you want to test some draft decision with the hope of modifying and improving it before deciding on its final form.

COMPARING APPROACHES

Each approach to decision making has certain strengths and weaknesses you should consider when selecting an approach for a given task.

Approach	Strength	Weakness
Consensus	Broad engagement and commitment of all participants to the decision.	Can be ineffective if not properly managed. Help the group specify agreements and respect disagreements. Don't get stuck debating and miss the opportunity to begin working with the areas of agreement.
Consent	While some participants may be more supportive of the decision than others, all must specifically give their support.	Can be ineffective if not properly managed. Need to be clear about the true meaning of consent.
Compromise	One broadly supported decision is reached in spite of multiple, possibly conflicting positions on what the decision should be.	Some participants are likely to feel they had to give up too much in order to reach closure. Decision may not be well supported.
Counting votes	One decision is reached in spite of multiple positions on what the decision should be. Can be efficient.	Can be ineffective as it may only achieve compliance, or something less, from those who feel that his/her "side" lost.
Consult	Final decision may be improved with the group's input. Also, can create more support and understanding of the eventual decision.	Needs to be handled openly and honestly, not suggesting more opportunity for influence by the group than is realistic.

CORE TOOL: THE GO-AROUND

What Is It?

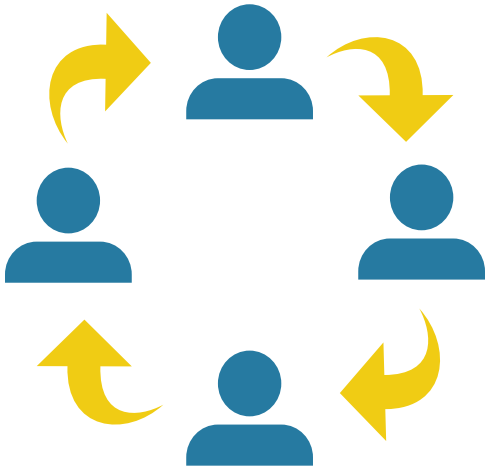
The Go-Around gives each person a brief turn to speak to the topic, without interruption. Everyone else listens.

Also known as a Round-Robin, Structured Go-Around, or as going "Around the Horn", this foundational meeting tool ensures that everyone can contribute their thoughts and comments.

Why Use It?

It is important to give all participants a chance to speak and be heard. Some people will talk more than others. Some may remain silent. People may be making assumptions about the views of others whether they hear from them or not. In a virtual meeting it is particularly difficult to keep all included and know what each person is thinking. A Go-Around addresses these challenges and keeps all engaged.

At the beginning of a virtual meeting, a Go-Around serves as an initial "check-in." It lets all know who is present and provides an opportunity for each participant to speak to the group. This makes it more likely s/he will continue to contribute to the meeting. A Go-Around is also a great way to balance the contributions across participants meeting face-face and those participating from remote locations.

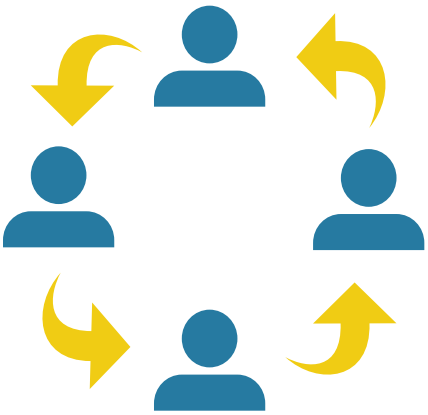


A Go-Around is very helpful when reaching decisions by consensus or consent. And a Go-Around is helpful when the group seems to be getting stuck in a discussion on some point. Complete a quick Go-Around asking for reflections on what participants now understand, or don't, regarding the original purpose of the discussion.

How to Lead a Go-Around

When you begin a Go-Around:

- **Set a specific expectation for how long each person should talk.** Sometimes you're looking for just one or two words, and other times you'll ask for comments. Even with longer answers, usually a minute or so is enough.
- **Explain that no one should speak twice before everyone has spoken once.** The Go-Around comes before or following discussion; during the Go-Around is not the time for any back-and-forth exchange of views and questions.



- In a meeting with more than 4 virtual participants, or in a hybrid meeting where the remote participants cannot see the people sitting together, **ask people to state their name when they start so all know who is speaking.**
- **Be clear about what you want shared.** When building a decision, you can ask each person to describe his/her support or explain his/her support and any reservations.

Tip: For virtual meetings, it helps to have a picture of meeting participants in front of you as a reminder of who is speaking—or to whom they may wish to direct a question or comment.

In Lucid Meetings, refer to the Attendee list when running a Go-Around. For groups with more than 5 remote attendees, consider turning on the **"Speaker Queue"** and asking people to **"Raise their Hand"** when they're ready to speak during the Go-Around.

PREPARING FOR YOUR DECISION-MAKING MEETING

A good decision-making meeting will get the group talking, sharing concerns, and **create the momentum** needed for the next steps.

But you do NOT want people to be surprised. People caught off-guard become defensive and cannot participate effectively in the meeting.

At a minimum, work to **write up the proposed decision(s)** and include this in the material sent with the meeting notice. Send invitations **at least 48 hours in advance**, and up to 1 week ahead of the meeting.

If a decision is particularly complex or important, consider talking with individual participants in advance to answer any questions they might have. Many board meetings, which often include several decisions on the agenda, are preceded by individual sessions to ensure every member comes ready to participate.

FOR BEST RESULTS
No surprises!

THE TEMPLATES

This guide includes templates for leading groups through the following decision making processes.

1 Making Decisions by Consensus

This template helps the group be specific about agreements while respecting disagreements.

2 Reaching Decisions by Consent and Compromise

Leads the group to a decision by consent or by compromise if consent is not possible. Consent means all accept the proposed decision as good enough. Compromise means participants will have to negotiate some points to meet each other half-way and produce a decision all can support.

3 Using the Group to Consult to the Final Decision Maker

Encourages productive feedback on a decision as input to the person with overall accountability who will make the final decision.

This guide does not include instructions for reaching decisions by counting votes.

For each process, you'll find an agenda outline and step-by-step instructions for leading that conversation.

STRUCTURE FOR MAKING DECISIONS BY CONSENSUS

MEETING GOAL
To develop a decision that we all can support.

DURATION
No longer than 1 hour.

1. **Welcome**
2. **Review the Proposed Decision**
3. **Discussion: Clarify Replies**
   - Confirm areas of full agreement
   - Identify disagreements and possible changes
4. **Final Check:**
   Confirm Agreements and Differences (if any)
   - Individually confirm consensus on all agreements & items for later attention
5. **Document Decisions and Next Steps**

Leading the Conversation

1

Welcome

Explain briefly (in your own words) what you mean by making a decision by consensus.

Once your group is ready to begin, start by making sure everyone has a shared understanding of what it means to achieve consensus.

For example, you might say:

> "Consensus means reaching a decision that all support. If someone has an objection to the decision under consideration, then consensus has not been achieved. Consensus also means that the opinion of each person is equal to that of everyone else. That said, we can choose to focus on the areas we all agree on, and recognize and set aside for now specific areas of disagreement. This will let us more forward for now and we will revisit the areas of disagreement in the future."

It is important to clarify your meaning up front since consensus sometimes means only that no one voiced an objection. We want clear support for all aspects of the decision we can agree on.

After this introduction, **click "Next >"** to move to the next item.

2

Review the Proposed Decision

Present the proposed decision and gather reactions from each person.

Begin by presenting the proposed decision. Check for any clarifying questions as needed, but this is not the time for debate.

2 continued

The process to achieve consensus then goes as follows:

A. Reaction Round
Lead a Go-Around to hear each person's reaction to the proposal. A brief (minute or less) comment from each person should be enough. **This is not a time for additional proposals or amendments nor is it time to go back and forth** between two or more of the group members.

Record the comments from each person where everyone can see them.

After you've heard from each person in the group and recorded their comments, **click "Next >"** to start clarifying replies.

3

Discussion: Clarify Replies

Confirm points of agreement and note where the group differs. Improve the proposal.

B. Revise the Proposal
The person making the original proposal can now revise it based on all comments received and present the revised proposal back to the group.

C. Clarifying Objection Round
Next, conduct another Go-Around of the whole group and ask for any remaining objections to the revised proposal. Note that any objection should reflect a specific personal concern or interest and be explained to the group.

If there are no remaining objections go to E, otherwise proceed to D to resolve the concerns.

D. Improve the Proposal
As a group, discuss how to improve the proposal, or remove parts of it, or include precautions or limits to the proposal. Complete any revisions.

When you're ready to confirm the decision, **click "Next"** to move to the next agenda item.

4

Final Check: Confirm Agreements and Differences (if any)

D. As necessary, record any remaining areas of disagreement and document these as "not yet agreed." Set these areas aside and clarify the remaining body of the proposal on which you will seek consensus.

E. Conduct a final Go-Around to check that there are no more objections: Once again Go-Around the group to give each person a chance to speak briefly about their support or concerns with this last version of the proposal. This is not a time for debate, but an opportunity to verify that there is (or is not) consensus given the revised/improved proposal.

Note: A consensus decision-making session should always end with a "no-objection" round to clarify the nature of the group's final consensus decision. If agreement has not been reached on all aspects of the proposal, this final no-objection round can be to confirm that all support some aspects and to clarify those areas where disagreements remain.

After successfully completing the "no-objection" round, **click "Next >"** to move to the final item.

5

Document Decisions and Next Steps

Document your decisions where the whole team can easily see and access them. Explain next steps to implement the decisions and set a specific plan to follow-up on any points not yet agreed to.

STRUCTURE FOR REACHING DECISIONS BY CONSENT AND COMPROMISE

MEETING GOAL
To arrive at a decision that all can explicitly consent to, even if this is a compromise.

DURATION
No longer than 1 hour.

1. **Welcome**
2. **Review the Proposed Decision**
3. **Discussion: Clarify Replies**
   - Can we revise the proposal to remove the sources of concern or objections?
   - If so, can the changes be made now?
4. **Revise the Proposal (optional)**
5. **Final Check for Agreement**
6. **Document Decisions and Next Steps**

Leading the Conversation

1

Welcome

Explain briefly (in your own words) what you mean by making a decision by consent

Your goal is to arrive at one common conclusion that all can consent to. In reaching consent, everyone should comment on the decision. Each person indicates whether s/he supports it or has a fundamental concern that this decision will have a negative impact on something critical to his/her responsibilities or customers. It does not have to be perfect, but "good enough." You may revise the proposal or develop a compromise approach to achieve consent from all.

After this introduction, **click "Next >"** to move to the next item.

2

Review the Proposed Decision

Present the proposed decision and gather reactions from each person.

Begin by reviewing the plan or proposal needing a decision from this group.

Next conduct a Go-Around of the whole group to hear from each person on where s/he stands on the decision. One person speaks at a time. Everyone else just listens. This is not the time for a debate.

Ask everyone to speak briefly to these two points:

- Does it have your full support or at least your consent, or neither?
- If you have a concern or objection, you should explain it briefly.

Record replies on a shared document where all can see.

After you've heard from each person, **click "Next >"** to start clarifying replies.

3

Discussion: Clarify Replies

Clarify replies where we differ and improve the proposal.

Using the notes, review the responses and confirm areas where there appears to be agreement. Then focus on any areas that represent problems or difficulties for some in the group.

Ask the group:

- Can we revise the proposal to remove the sources of concern or objections?
- If so, can we make these changes right now? Or should we give this to a subgroup to work on off-line and bring back?

With the group's help, make any revisions or clarifications that can be made right now.

Does this give you a complete proposal as revised? If so, skip to step 5.

If not, recruit a small group (2-3 people) to work on developing a revised proposal that would represent a compromise on the points that are presenting difficulty.

Tip: If there are significant issues to be resolved to gain everyone's consent, then I recommend that you assign this to a small group. Do not attempt to do this in the meeting with the entire group. A small group can almost always do this work more efficiently and effectively.

See Step 4.

4

Revise the Proposal (optional)

If necessary, identify several people to develop a compromise or resolve the remaining objections and come back with a revised proposal.

Appoint a small team of 2-3 people work outside of the meeting to revise the proposal and bring it back to the whole group for a final decision. Be clear about how long they have to do this and any other parameters on their work. They should be sure to consider all the comments received so far and avoid doing anything that would create new or additional objections.

Adjourn the meeting, perhaps for just a brief break or until some later time, until the revised/compromise proposal can be brought back for the whole group's review.

Once the revised proposal is ready, you can proceed to the final step.

5

Final Check for Agreement

Review the revised proposal and check for agreement.

(Reconvene if you adjourned to develop a compromise proposal.)

Review the proposal as revised in Step 3 or Step 4 and then Go-Around again to hear from each person on where s/he stands on this last version of the proposed decision. **Ask everyone** to address the following:

- Does the proposal have your full support or your consent, or neither? If you have a remaining concern or objection, you should explain it briefly and offer a resolution.

6

Document Decisions and Next Steps

Finally, document the decisions. Review next steps to implement the decisions.

STRUCTURE FOR USING THE GROUP TO CONSULT TO THE FINAL DECISION MAKER

MEETING GOAL
Review the proposal and collect feedback for the final version.

DURATION
35 to 45 minutes

1. **Introduction**
2. **Presentation**
3. **Silent Reflection**
4. **Feedback**
   - What do you like about the proposal?
   - Where do you need more information?
   - Where do you have concerns?
5. **Closing and Next Steps**

   Closing question:

   What are we learning about this proposal?

Leading the Conversation

1

Introduction

When the group is ready, explain in your own words how the decision will be made and what you need. For example, you might say:

> “I have a proposed decision on which I’d like your input, to provide consulting to me on my final decision. I am responsible for the final decision, but I need your input.
>
> After hearing your views, I will revisit the proposal and let you know how I’ve taken your feedback into account when I am ready to make the final decision.”

After this introduction, **click “Next >”** to move to the next item.

2

Presentation

Present the proposed decision for review. Try to keep your presentation short—no more than 10 minutes is best.

Avoid opening up discussion during or immediately after your presentation, although you can address any questions of clarification. If the group seems on the verge of giving feedback or opening up a discussion, ask them to wait for now so that you can get all the feedback out first.

When you’re ready, **click “Next >”** to start reflecting and gathering feedback.

3

Reflection

Give everyone a minute or two to reflect on the decision and their own thoughts on the three questions.

Ask people to reflect on their reactions to what was presented and then do the same yourself.

3 continued

If you are meeting on-line, you'll see these questions in the agenda. If meeting face-face, have the questions written on whiteoard where all can see them.

1) What do you like about the proposal?

2) Where do you need further information?

3) Where do you have concerns?

Tip:
Don't make a big deal of this reflection – just do it.

The online meeting includes a timer automatically set for 2 minutes for this. You may need less time; feel free to adjust this for your group.

If some start to talk, ask them to hold their comments so everyone has a chance to organize their thoughts.

When you're ready to start hearing feedback, **click "Next"** to move to the next agenda item.

4

Feedback: Hearing replies to questions

At this point you have two choices.

Option 1:
For online meetings and/or small groups

Ask for responses from each person, one question at a time beginning with the first question. Make sure you **get all replies to the first question before proceeding to the second**.

The online agenda is set up to walk the group through each question, one at a time. After you have all the replies to question 1, **click "Next"** to move on to question 2 and then 3.

As you listen to replies, **check for duplicate replies**. If someone has the same comment as one already shared,

4
continued

just affirm that the feedback has been heard and don't waste the group's time listening to a repeated point.

As the replies come in, **record/summarize the feedback to each question in the online notes**, or on a whiteboard if meeting face-to-face. Taking notes that everyone can see helps the group focus its attention and helps each individual see that their feedback has been heard.

Just listen and record for now, and avoid answering questions. Once you begin to reply, it becomes a back and forth and you lose the ability for everyone to hear all the feedback.

Option 2:
For groups of 8 or more in a face-face meeting

In larger groups, it is good to begin this step by asking everyone to first share their replies with one other person around the table, before you begin to gather their replies to the three questions.

Again, make sure to write all replies where the whole group can see them.

After writing down all feedback to the three questions, **click "Next >"** to move to the final item.

What's the difference between a "need for information" and a "concern"?

Often one person's concern is another's need for information. The difference is unimportant to the feedback. Even though the difference doesn't matter for the meeting result, always ask both questions. This helps people think about the proposal from several angles and leads to better feedback overall.

5

Closing discussion and next steps

Finally, explain what you intend to do with the feedback received in forming your decision. Explain that you will present the decision and how you considered the group's feedback in arriving at that decision.

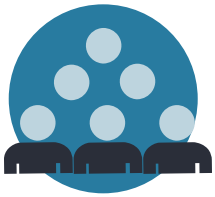
Then, thank your group and **click "End Meeting"**.

You're done!

Three Ways to Document Results

Using Whiteboards or Flipcharts in Face-to-Face Meetings

Before the meeting, set up your whiteboard or flip-charts with dedicated space/sheets for:



1. The proposed decision, and any revisions made during the meeting.
2. Capturing replies to each Go-Around
3. Documenting areas of disagreement to be resolved or worked later
4. Listing Next Steps

Using an Online Co-Editing Document Application (Google Docs, Microsoft Word Online, etc.)

Before the meeting, create a new document that everyone in the group can access and edit together. Include a link to this document in your meeting invitation. Add the meeting name as the document title, then add the proposed decision.

For Consensus and Consent/Compromise decisions, create a heading for "Areas of Agreement" and one for "Areas Not Yet Agreed." Write notes under each heading during the meeting, and edit the proposed decision as needed.

For notes on a decision where the group is consulting to the leader, create three headings, one for each of the three questions and track the replies to the "likes," information needed," and "concerns."

Using Lucid Meetings

Each template includes built-in space for documenting results.

- Add notes to each agenda item by clicking the "Add Notes" button.
- To see notes from previous agenda items, click "Search" in the meeting menu.
- To revise the proposed decision, copy the decision into a note and edit it.
- Add and assign Action Items to capture next steps.

AFTER THE MEETING

Send out the meeting notes

If you use Lucid Meetings, simply click the “Send Follow-Up” button after the meeting. Alternatively, send a link to the final Google Doc, or type up the written notes from the meeting and send these out. You want to make sure everyone has a documented copy of the decision they can easily find later.

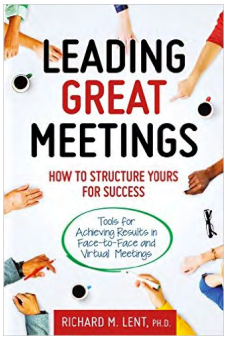
Confirm assignments

Follow-up with everyone assigned with a new task after the conversation. Ensure they understand the task and the deadline.

Schedule any follow-up meetings

Did you assign action items or tasks in your meeting? If so, make sure you have a time scheduled for the group to check in on progress.

RESOURCES FOR ACHIEVING MEETING MASTERY



The Book

This template is based upon the tools I call **Three Reaction Questions** and **1-2-All**.
These are two of the 32 tools described in:
Leading Great Meetings: How to Structure Yours for Success

Other related tools include:

- Visible Note Taking,
- 5Cs of decision making (consensus, consent, compromise, counting votes and consulting to the leader),
- Consensus Guidelines, and
- PALPaR (Present, Ask, Listen, Pause and Reply)

On the Web

Meeting for Results Resources and Blog
http://www.meetingforresults.com/resources/

On the Lucid Meetings Blog

"Getting Work Done in Meetings: Structures for Success"
http://blog.lucidmeetings.com/blog/getting-work-done-in-meetings-structures-for-success

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This template was designed by Richard Lent, Ph.D.

Dr. Richard Lent has spent the last 25 years identifying structures for more effective meetings and coaching leaders in their use. He facilitates meetings around the world in business, non-profit organizations and communities. Some of the organizations with which he has worked include the World Food Programme, USAID, UNICEF, Logitech, the WK Kellogg Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. He has also worked with dozens of local civic, religious and nonprofit groups.

Rick delivers workshops and presentations on a structural approach to better meetings. In 2015, he published his second book, Leading Great Meetings: How to Structure Yours for Success. He wrote this book to help leaders to use the structure of their meetings much more effectively. It provides 12 choices and 32 tools to plan and conduct a wide range of meetings from team meetings to board meetings.

Rick received his Ph.D. from Syracuse University in Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation and continued his studies in organizational learning and development. He shares his perspective on meetings on his blog at www.meetingforresults.com.

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