At its simplest, consensus means agreement. But it is a special kind of agreement - agreement after every opinion has been heard and after discussion of the options has been held. Consensus, by definition, is an agreement reached by a group as a whole. It is also a method of decision making.

The Method of Consensus

Consensus as a method of decision making values equality in membership and enables each individual the opportunity to have their opinion heard and valued. The method values and uses the resources each person has to offer. By using this method both individual and group participation are valued. Consensus creates high quality decisions which improve cohesiveness within the group

Each of the individuals within the group has the opportunity and are expected to fully contribute their complete view on an issue. This process requires each within the group to listen and effectively communicate with each other. Decisions achieved by consensus are more efficient because every individual has a fair chance to contribute to the choice and agrees and supports the choice made by the group. The result is clarification of goals and active participation by each member of the group.

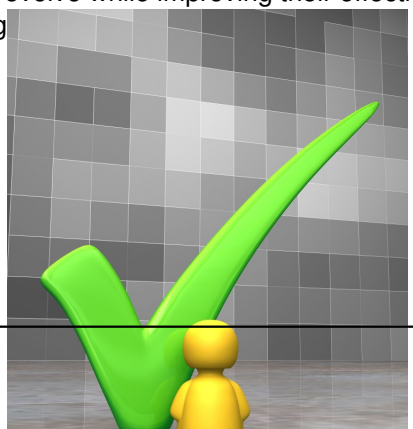
Consensus is the primary method of decision making used by the Teams of the Scout Programs of Adventure Scouts USA.

Why our Scout Programs Use Consensus

Equal opportunity and equal participation is a core of the Spirit and Promise of the Scout Programs of Adventure Scouts USA. In an effort to bridge all communities, we actively encourage and value the inclusion of all. It is important that each of our Scout's opinions are valued, and that they are regarded equally, whatever their differences. Everyone in the Scout Programs of Adventure Scouts USA receives equal treatment.

Therefore the teams of our Scout Programs are structured with equality in membership enabling each of our Scouts the opportunity to have their opinion heard and valued. Consensus allows our teams to value and use the resources each of our Scouts has to offer. Consequently, within our teams both individual and team participation are valued.

Each team then implements innovative high quality decisions made on a consensus basis which strengthens the bond between them. Using each of these concepts enable improved communication within our teams which results in clarification of goals and for more FUN to be had by all. Our teams are effective because they plan and achieve their own goals. They continue to evolve while improving their effectiveness, because they use consensus as their primary method of decision making



Elements of Consensus

* Discussion until everyone agrees
* Problems with an idea are revealed
* An agreed upon time limit for discussion

Consensus and Democracy

Consensus is a facet of democratic governance. To attain the true will of the people, everyone's opinion must be heard. Hearing everyone's opinion is vital because everyone looks at things a different way. It is important to know what a person's opinion is and why they hold that opinion. The clearest example of consensus in our country is the jury system. All on the jury must agree, and if they do not agree, they must discuss it until they do. Similarly, our Scouts agree which adventures to go on in the same way.

Advantages of Consensus

There are many advantages to consensus. One person may have information the others do not. For example, if our Scouts want to see a new panda exhibit at the zoo, but one of the Scouts thinks that exhibit may be closed on that particular day, the team can make a call to the zoo to find out. The entire team may have wasted a trip if they had not solicited every Scout's opinion.

Consensus also allows our Scouts to develop self confidence by presenting their ideas and listening to other Scouts present their own. Our Scouts get experience debating and standing up for their own ideas, while listening to the ideas of others fairly.

Those who practice consensus want to hear from those who disagree with them because all discussion can only fine tune an idea. Even after consensus has been used to reach an agreement, consensus can be used to discuss the details, making the plan more solid. Details such as when to get to the zoo, where to park, where to eat, can all be hashed out ahead of time, making the actual trip as seamless as possible.

The Difference Between Consensus and Compromise

The two words and ideas are similar, and both involve discussion and agreement. However, a compromise takes place when two parties both "give a little" and make a third choice. If there are two people who both want to go somewhere together, but cannot agree on where to go, some may use compromise. In that case, one person who wants to go to the movies would give that up, and another person who wants to go hiking would give that up, and they may decide to go to lunch instead. One drawback to compromise is that the participants might wind up doing something no one wants to do! Our Scouts do use compromise occasionally, but it is consensus they use to make their team decisions.

In consensus, when the discussion has whittled down the choices to the most popular two or three, our Scouts discuss which of those three activities to participate in. Our Scouts discuss the issue until they all agree and every voice is heard.