Charter and Group Guidelines

Background and Purpose

The Conservation Fund provided a grant for the Walnut Creek Wetland Community Partnership, administered by the Water Resources Research Institute and College of Natural Resources at NC State University. The purpose is to engage community in identifying and building a park or greenway facility that benefits community and the environment, focuses on equity, and provides educational, career, and training opportunities throughout the project. The facility can be part of an existing park or greenway, a stand-alone facility, or multiple smaller facilities in the community.

Roles of Participants:

Community Task Force members will

- review relevant information, including meeting summaries, for decision-making
- determine criteria and provide guidance for selecting project site (s)
- share updates with neighbors and community members
- provide feedback on designs and installation
- help create learning opportunities for youth and community members
- attend Task Force meetings quarterly or as needed through 2019

Technical advisors will provide information and raise issues that they believe are important for the Task Force to consider. They are encouraged but not required to attend all meetings and will not be party to the final decision-making for the project. They will represent their organization and speak with other colleagues in their organization as needed to provide up to date information.

Project staff will coordinate meetings of the Task Force, send agendas and meeting summaries well before meetings. They will bring in technical advisors to provide relevant info as needed, administer the grant and coordinate with the project funders (Conservation Fund).

Use of consensus in the decision-making process

The Task Force will operate by consensus. Decisions will be made only with concurrence of all members represented at the meeting. Project staff will help the team reach consensus. Consensus allows collaborative problem-solving to work. It requires sharing information and allows building of trust, which leads to mutual education and, in turn, provides the basis for crafting workable and acceptable alternatives. Consensus promotes joint thinking in a diverse group and leads to creative solutions. Also, because all parties participate in the deliberation, they understand the reasoning behind the recommendations and are willing to support them. Consensus does not mean that everyone will be equally happy with the decision, but all do accept that the decision is the best that could be made at the time.

The team will reach consensus when it finally agrees upon a single alternative and each participant can honestly say:

- I believe that other participants understand my point of view.
- I believe I understand other participants' points of view.
- Whether or not I prefer this decision, I support it because it was arrived at openly and fairly, and it is the best solution for us at this time.

LEVELS OF CONSENSUS

As you discuss and evaluate proposals, it is easy to get stuck if your only choices are to either accept or reject each proposal offered. Not everyone will agree (or disagree) with equal enthusiasm to a particular proposal. The group must discover how each member feels about each proposal. If some members disagree with a proposal, the group must discover the unmet needs that led to the objections and revise the proposal to include a way to meet those needs.

To see how close the group is to agreeing, we'll use a five-finger scale. The scale allows precise interpretation of support for a decision, from enthusiastic through lukewarm to ambiguous support. Everyone can judge whether the degree of support warrants continued action. The scale allows you to communicate your intentions, assess the degree of agreement that exists, and register your dissatisfaction without holding up the rest of the group.

Show by the number of fingers you hold up your level of agreement to a given proposal:
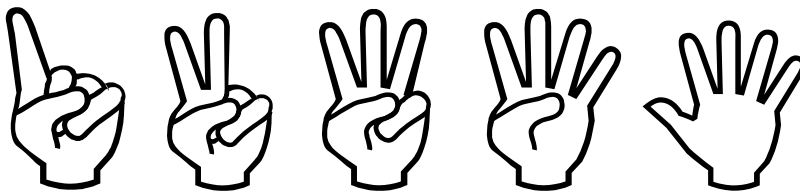
> **1 Finger:** Endorsement (I like it.)
> **2 Fingers:** Endorsement with a Minor Point of Contention (Basically, I like it.)
> **3 Fingers:** Agreement with Reservations (I can live with it.)
> **4 Fingers:** Stand Aside (I don't like this, but I don't want to hold up the group.)
> **5 Fingers:** Block (I won't support the proposal.)

Standing aside allows a group member to register dissatisfaction with a proposal without preventing the group from adopting and implementing the plan. But if a group member blocks a proposal, the group cannot reach consensus even if everyone else wants to adopt it. If your group is unable to rework a proposal so that a dissatisfied member can at least stand aside, you may want to use two additional levels of agreement* that can be inserted between standing aside (four fingers) and blocking a proposal (five fingers), so the group can move forward:

- Formal Disagreement, but Willing to Go with Majority (I want my disagreement noted in writing, but I'll support the decision.)
- Formal Disagreement with Request to Be Absolved of Responsibility for Implementation (I don't want to stop others, but I don't want to be involved in implementing the decision.