

Board of Trustees Adopts Consensus Process

At a Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting in mid-2004, board members passed a resolution to explore a decision-making process based on consensus rather than on the formal parliamentary process.

It took this initiative for two main reasons:

First, Concept Twelve suggests making all decisions on the basis of substantial unanimity, which is when almost everyone agrees with the idea. The formal “for” and “against” debate process can lend itself to people taking one side or the other of an argument, rather than trying to find a middle-ground solution that might suit everyone better.

Second, the BOT often became bogged down in amendments, and amendments to amendments, and had to think on our feet with no time left for the wise reflection that often brings out the best decision. As a result, at subsequent meetings the board had to correct some poorly worded motions.

The board hoped to find a process by which our decisions would reflect the wishes and concerns of all participating, and that, as stated in Concept Two, the voice and concerns of the minority would receive due consideration. It would also give us time to make sure the wording accurately reflected our intention.

We have tried the process over the last year, refining it as we went along, and at a recent meeting we approved guidelines for the consensus meetings that are held at each quarterly BOT meeting.

The main points of the process are:

- The board encourages its members to, whenever possible, bring new issues to the informal meeting prior to preparing and presenting motions. The board discusses all proposed motions at a separate consensus meeting before the regular formal meeting. The managing director and department managers of the World Service Office shall be available onsite to answer questions if needed.
- The board defines “consensus” in this context as “something we can all live with.”
- The consensus meeting is an opportunity for BOT members to discuss possible amendments, substitutions or alternatives to a motion.
- No formal voting takes place at this meeting.
- A subcommittee drafts amendments and substitutions prior to the formal meeting. Preferably, the subcommittee consists of the maker of the motion, other members both for and against the motion and those with a minority viewpoint.
- If the board does not reach consensus, it may hold over the item until the next quarterly BOT meeting.

We believe the process has achieved the desired results thus far and, in particular, supports a more accurate reflection of the purpose and wording of our Traditions and Concepts.

Although the trustees created the consensus guidelines for use in our board meetings, we hope other service bodies may wish to adapt the process to the needs in their areas. The consensus guidelines begin on the following page.

-- Member of the Board of Trustees

Guidelines For Establishing Consensus

PROTOCOLS

1. All motions on the BOT formal meeting agenda will be placed on the agenda of an open discussion meeting chaired by the chair of the BOT. This meeting shall be held before both the BOT informal meeting, and the BOT formal meeting. The managing director and the WSO managers are invited to attend to provide information on relevant motions. Interested members of the fellowship are also invited to attend as observers. The Chair will allocate sufficient time on the BOT agenda for this meeting. The chair will prioritize the order of motions discussed in terms of importance to the fellowship as a whole, with particular regard to external (e.g. WSBC) deadlines.
2. Motions dealing with staffing actions, legal issues, or other matters deemed appropriate by the BOT chair are to be deferred to a closed meeting. Relevant staff will be invited to attend for provision of information only, where required. Financial issues, such as the budget, are to be brought to the open meeting.
3. BOT members are encouraged, where time permits, to bring any potentially contentious new ideas/problems to the Board informal meeting before bringing a formal motion to the next board meeting, with the purpose of a) assessing support for the item and b) gathering a variety of potential solutions before development of a motion.
4. “Consensus” will be loosely defined as “something we can all live with.”
5. No committee/trustee/officer reports will be part of this discussion. The reports are not motions.
6. The consensus agenda in no way interferes with the normal consent process. All motions remain on the consent agenda until removed.
7. The BOT formal meeting is to ratify the motions. No formal votes may be taken during the consensus discussion meeting, though straw polls may be taken if desired.

MEETING PROCEDURE

8. The discussion meeting would be an opportunity for possible amendments, opinions, alternatives, etc. to be raised. The chair will invite discussion and questions from all present in keeping with the running of an informal meeting, bearing in mind the need to consider the voice of the minority viewpoint and the need to reach consensus wherever possible. Depending on the number participating, methods may include that the chair go around the room and ask everyone to make a comment, if they chose; that if there are a large number of people, those who wish to will make comments,

possibly with a reminder signal after two minutes; that anyone who wishes to make a second comment wait until everyone had a chance to speak at least once; that individuals be invited, where appropriate, to share out of sequence to allow hearing of differing viewpoints.

9. The maker(s) of the motion will speak for no more than two minutes to give any additional background.
10. If consensus is not reached on any particular item at the discussion meeting, it may be held over to the next quarterly BOT meeting. If an issue is deemed to be of such urgency that it cannot be held over, it will be placed on the agenda of the BOT formal meeting at that gathering of the BOT. If consensus cannot be reached and it is apparent that a motion will be lost, it is recommended that the motion be withdrawn from the BOT formal agenda by the maker of the motion at the BOT formal meeting.

LITERATURE ITEMS

11. The Chair may consider a separate question and answer session for substantial literature items. The chair will ascertain acceptance in principle before editorial/wordsmithing issues are addressed. The relevant committee will then represent the item in writing to the full BOT meeting.

AMENDMENTS

12. Any amendments/substitutions, including those arising from the discussion meeting, would be drafted by a subcommittee composed of the maker(s) and other interested parties before the formal BOT meeting. Particular consideration will be given to including on this subcommittee those both for and against the motion, and those with a minority viewpoint. Any amendments to motions needed as a result of the consensus discussion will be referred to a subcommittee for development. Amendments arising will be given to all BOT members in writing prior to voting at the BOT formal meeting.