

Consultative Decision-Making

Consultative decision-making is a process by which decision-makers draw upon the best wisdom of a group of individuals, and use that wisdom to inform the decisions they make. It's about listening and tuning in to deeper considerations and movements, and taking deep responsibility for making those decisions. Not to be confused with voting, consultative decision-making relies on rich discussion, attunement and collaboration.

In this style of decision-making, others are invited to gather- to contribute, give their perspectives, feelings, intuitions and expertise. Participants have a responsibility to fully and clearly speak their perspectives within the circle. The decision makers have a responsibility to deeply listen, be impacted by, and make decisions based on their deepest sense of what is best. Those who contributed, having been fully heard, have a responsibility to support the decision made, whether the decision goes their way or not.

Listening Circles are used in consultative decision-making. Decision-makers, in collaboration with Circle Keepers, will call a listening circle to "listen to the system", hear perspectives, and glean collective wisdom about the issue at hand—not to find consensus and not to vote. The listening circle is an opportunity for people to share their perspectives and feelings in an open environment , where all voices can be heard, honored, and respected. Decision-makers listen deeply to all voices, and then step away to consider all that was shared. They take the time they need to make the wisest decision, and then communicate that decision to the group. Depending on the gravity or importance of the decision, there can be up to three decision makers

Everyone in the consultative decision-making process has agency and responsibility in their given roles. The key ingredient is the generous respect and trust given to all involved—both decision-makers and participants. This style allows everyone to have their voice heard and expands the decision-makers' perspective. It also allows decisions to move forward, with community participation and alignment.

Consultative Decision-Making Steps

1. Who is Making the Decision?

- Determine - who is making the decision? 1-3 people, depending on the decision.
- Consider having diversity in the group - age, gender, perspective, position

2. Meet with TLC to clarify and plan the listening circle

- How many circles might be needed?
- Who are the stakeholders? Who cares about or will be impacted by the decision?
- Who will be the circle keepers?
- Always prepare for the circle using the circle template worksheet
- Decide what communication should go out ahead of time.
- What is the vital information people will need, in order to fully contribute?
- Send out communication/invitation

3. Listening Circle

- Gather in Circle with talking object and centerpiece
- 2 circle keepers; 1-3 decision makers
- Circle keepers open the circle and create alignment with communication agreements
- Decision-makers explain the decision on the table and that they are here to listen
- Take a moment of quiet, tune in to 3rd entity, set intentions
- Everyone weighs in—decision makers included (taking their turn somewhere in the middle, i.e. they should not be the first nor the last to speak)
- Go around the circle twice. Sometimes 3 times is necessary if the decision makers need more information.

- Do decision-makers have questions or anything else they need to clarify? Is another round called for?
- TLC Circle Keepers and decision-makers thank the participants.
- Decision-makers let the circle know the timeline for coming to a decision and that they will consider the input.
- Decision-makers and TLC let participants know how they will be informed of the decision. (e-mail, phone call, in-person, in a circle, etc.)
- Decision-makers step away and make the decision together- or decide to call further circles, in certain circumstances, where more information needs to be gathered.

4. Decision-Making

- Decision-makers meet to discuss and answer questions that arose, possibly gather more information, and ultimately make the decision. Sometimes another circle will be needed. (Or, perhaps this is one in a series of circles on the same topic)
- Inform the group, acknowledging how the group impacted the decision—be transparent about how you came to the decision, and honor those who disagreed.
- Ask for their support in getting behind the decision

Responsibilities of Decision-Makers and Participants in Listening Circles

The following articulation of responsibilities was generated by the sangha, in the process of working together to learn consultative decision making.

Responsibilities of Decision-Makers

Before the circle

- Consider who will be impacted by the decision
- Make sure to invite them to participate
- Communicate clearly with circle keepers to organize the appropriate circle(s)

During the circle

- Articulate the question clearly
- Provide all necessary information and relevant details
- Honor communication agreements
- Listen deeply, with curiosity
- Be open to influence

- Value diverse viewpoints and dissenting voices
- Express personal viewpoint honestly and transparently
- Set personal agendas aside to listen to what is wanted by the system
- Hold a soft focus on the individuals, listen for the good of the whole
- Tune in to the intelligence of the 3rd entity

- Describe how you will be making the decision and the timing (and whether there will be other circles)
- Trust and Respect all Participants

After circle(s)

- Walk away and integrate the information
- Consider everyone's input thoroughly
- Gather more information if needed
- Hold another circle or circles if needed
- Decide how to communicate the final decision

Communicating a decision

- Communicate the decision with confidence and clarity
- Explain how you came to that decision
- Communicate with compassion for all parties
- Honor those who may still disagree

Responsibilities of Participants (Recipients of final Decision)

Before the circle

- Come prepared, review any related materials
- Prepare to participate

During the circle

- Show up and participate
- Stay engaged, ask for clarification if needed
- Bring your voice, be honest

- Honor communication agreements
- Stay vulnerable and open
- Speak from your own experience
- Avoid advice or "teaching"

- Let go of personal agendas

- It's ok to feel differently
- Be respectful of different points of view
- Stay open, hold a mood of generous trust
- Listen deeply to others with curiosity
- Trust and respect circle keepers and decision-makers

After circle(s)

- Avoid side conversations or “the meeting after the meeting”
- Support the decision that is made even if you don't agree with it
- Respect the process.