



The Somali Family Care Network Capacity Building

Make the Decision

There are a number of different styles of decision-making:

Avoiding or abdicating a decision

Although this is not usually recognized as a decision-making style, in fact the board may delegate many of its responsibilities this way, and not always deliberately. Failure to reach agreement can lead to the board passing the problem to the Executive Director or a committee.

Voting - decision by majority rule

Following a thorough discussion of the problem and options, a formal motion is presented. A vote is taken on the motion. How the motion is framed shapes the scope of the discussion and can narrow the options. Issues can be approached in several different ways. A motion reduces these options to one, and limits the response to "yes" or "no". This may eliminate many important alternatives. The process of framing the question and the options is at least as important as the vote itself. Board members should not propose motions too early in the discussion before reviewing all the alternatives.

For example, in addressing a shortfall in funds, a board member might make a motion immediately about a specific idea. "I move we have a fundraising bazaar." Discussion then focuses on whether a bazaar is a good idea. This effectively removes other options, or indeed other ways of looking at the problem, such as deciding what portion of the shortfall should come from fundraising, what portion from cuts in expenditures, and what portion from grants or loans or other actions.

Boards may use Robert's Rules of Order, or some other form of parliamentary procedure. However, because these rules are somewhat complicated, they can lead the board to focus on procedure rather than content. Adhering to a set of rules, such as Robert's, is appropriate for large meetings where decisions with legal implications are being made, e.g. appointing the auditor at the annual meeting.

Consensus

This is less formal than voting procedures and allows a decision to encompass the views of all board members. This approach works when there is a high degree of agreement among board members about the basic values and mission of the organization, and about how to work together as a board. The essential ingredient is openness – the ability to listen to each other, the willingness to offer honest opinions and new ideas, and the ability to change one's opinion based on what is said by other board members.

Variations on the consensus style:

Pure consensus: In this approach, the decision is not finalized until all members of the board agree to it. Active opposition will block a decision. To pass a decision, board members merely agree to let it stand. The danger is that this process does not engender the kind of strong support that might be required to implement the decision.

General consensus: If a majority of board members support the decision, it carries. Concerns and reservations of non-supporting board members may be noted.

It is possible to combine these methods. A board may choose to have the substantive discussion and decision through consensus, and then formalize it through a motion.

Source - <http://www.boarddevelopment.org/>