

What can we do? Decision-making processes

Task	Some questions to ask	Example	What can we do?
Look at the different types of decision making and discuss what would work best for your organisation or community.	<p>How has our organisation made decisions in the past?</p> <p>Are decisions usually made by consensus?</p> <p>What works? What doesn't?</p> <p>What sort of decisions does our organisation need to make?</p> <p>When do problems arise?</p> <p>Are there sometimes decisions that could involve a conflict of interest?</p>	<p>A council often makes decisions about housing allocation. To avoid family pressures on councillors and to ensure a fair approach, the council relies on a housing policy. It incorporates criteria such as the length of time applicants have spent on the waiting list and assesses the needs of people on the list. If a councillor has an interest in a matter (usually because it involves a relative), the councillor must leave the room and does not take part in making the decision.</p> <p>Another agency makes decisions based on consensus, democratic process or traditional authority depending on the matter. The traditional authority means there are people in charge who can be depended on to make the hard decisions when necessary.</p>	
Decide what type of decision-making process your organisation will use.	<p>Should we always rely on one form of decision making or would a mix of methods also work?</p>	<p>An artists' organisation makes decisions by consensus after clear information, usually visual, has been presented to its committee for consideration. The committee consults senior members for advice to help it make decisions.</p> <p>Another community corporation realises that while it takes longer using consensus decision making, the process leads to stronger decisions.</p> <p>Two different centres use a mix of traditional</p>	

and democratic processes at meetings. The main approach is traditional consensus following open discussion and debate, but if disagreements arise the centres adopt a democratic process and put the decision to a vote.

A board of an organisation uses ‘business angels’—experts who volunteer their time to support the board to make informed decisions. They form an associate, non-Indigenous membership base, with no voting rights. This board also uses AdviceBank (of the Australia Business Arts Foundation) and other volunteer organisations.

An enterprise has chosen to make decisions using a ‘majority rules’ model. However, the board is strongly committed to working as a team so the directors always try for a general consensus.

Develop a decision-making protocol.

Who needs to be consulted when we are making decisions?

If agreement can’t be reached, what other decision-making methods will we use?

Do different methods work better for different types of decisions (such as operational or strategic decisions)?

What role does traditional authority play in our decision making?

Are there any time limits for

A foundation uses its handbook to outline how its committee strives for consensus decisions. Decisions are ultimately reached through majority resolutions based on a show of hands. The handbook also sets out clear protocols to ensure that conflicts of interest and confidential considerations are managed properly.

A community council never imposes a time limit on debates; it understands that some issues, especially cultural ones, are far too important to have such limits.

decisions?

Make sure your board has all the information it needs.

How can we improve the informed quality of decisions made by our governing body?

What can we use to improve the flow of information and the quality of decisions? Could we use explanatory tools, visual tools or training?

A credit union holds a separate meeting with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander board of directors (traditional owners or Elders make up half the board) on the day before a board meeting. An interpreter runs through the board papers in the directors' language. This means the directors are aware of what will be discussed at the meeting.

Another institute sends a file containing the agenda and all relevant supporting documentation to its members before its meeting, to ensure they have all the information they need to make good decisions.

Have a protocol in place to break deadlocks.

How will we break a deadlock?

Does the chair have a casting vote? Or should we seek further information from Elders or community members?

A service sometimes involves Elders to break a deadlock with the board when it is appropriate.

Another association seeks assistance from leaders if difficult cultural issues arise.