



## Unit: Group Decision Making

### Skill 37: Building Consensus

#### Activity A: Honoring All Voices

#### Activity Skills:

Group discussion.

#### Leadership Skills:

Understanding some methods to allow everyone to speak and have input in the discussion.

#### Suggested Level:

Beginning

#### Time:

20-30 minutes

#### Supplies needed:

- Paper
- Pens or pencils

#### Do Ahead:

#### Source:

Developed by:  
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#### Based On:

*Growing Communities Curriculum: Community Building and Organizational Development through Community Gardening, American Community Gardening Association*

#### BACKGROUND:

We have all been to meetings where only a few people dominated the discussion and others were almost silent. While stronger personalities can easily monopolize such group discussions, it is important in many situations to make sure that every person has an opportunity to speak. Within organizations when a major policy is being discussed or a major decision being reviewed, or within a community all voices should be heard so that every person can feel recognized and the situation can reach the best possible end.

Effective leaders – and good facilitators – can guide a meeting or group discussion so that each person has an opportunity to speak. These approaches can be especially effective when only a few people are dominating, or when the debate has become very heated and the pace of the discussion needs to shift and allow time for people to cool down.

#### WHAT TO DO:

Present the participants with a scenario. If the group is a group already, then use an example from their circumstances. If the group has just assembled for the training, use the example of a town meeting.

**Town Meeting Scenario:** 5 people will serve as the planning commission, with one person as the chair of the commission. The rest of the participants will serve as the townspeople, who have mixed feelings about a new ball field that is being proposed. Some are there in support of the fields, which mean an expanded baseball program for their children. Others are opposed, because the lights and noise from the fields will disturb their homes nearby. The situation becomes contentious, with the two sides arguing. The planning commission is trying to gain an understanding of the real concerns, but a couple of people have simply gotten into a shouting match.

Have the participants role play this scenario, or one that is relevant to the group, for a few minutes. Then ask them to pause, and have the chair propose using one of the following strategies for discussion:

- Have each person write down one thing they would like to see or hear to feel it is an effective, productive meeting.
- Have each person share one idea only.
- Have the larger group break into small groups, with each group summarizing their members' key points and reporting back to the whole.

Use one of these strategies to make sure every person has an opportunity to express their input or thoughts on the issue.

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<p><b>Notes:</b></p>	<p><b>TALK IT OVER:</b></p> <p><b>Reflect:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What strategy did you use?</li><li>• How did it change the dynamic of the group?</li><li>• What comments came out when everyone had a chance to speak?</li></ul> <p><b>Apply:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How have you dealt with difficult discussion or meetings in your own group?</li><li>• Can you see applications of the approaches outlined here?</li><li>• Do you think that the end result of discussions and meetings would change if everyone had a more equal voice?</li></ul> <p><b>BEYOND THE BOX:</b></p> <p><b>Optional Homework:</b></p> <p>Investigate some references on meeting facilitation. What tips and tactics did you learn for dealing with difficult dynamics? How will you use these techniques in your own work?</p> <p><b>Resources And Web Links:</b></p> <p>Abi-Nader, Jeanette, Kendall Dunnigan, and Kristin Markley. 2001. <i>Growing Communities Curriculum: Community Building and Organizational Development through Community Gardening</i>, American Community Gardening Association</p>
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