Starter Kit
1h: Establishing a Decision Making Process

Navigating the Roadmap
Activity 1: Build a genuine, collaborative policy team.

Introduction
Agreeing to a decision making process is one of the first steps of a successful policy team. Decisions may be made by consensus, majority vote, or some other way. While consensus decision making is often the ideal method, it is easier said than done.

Consider that "consensus is not compromise, nor abdication, nor winning so that others lose. Rather, consensus is an agreement with others that may not be an ideal solution, but is a result that all can 'live with.'"[1]

Purpose
To facilitate a dialogue among team members that will result in a process for team decision making.

Participants
All policy team members should be involved in establishing a decision making process for the team.

Instructions
1. Have a discussion about how the team will make decisions before or while your team decides on its ground rules and operating norms.[2]

2. Begin by asking your team members to think about how they would like group decisions to be made. Discuss the following questions:
   a. Will team members agree that decisions should be made by consensus (rather than by the group chair or by majority vote)?
   b. Will all—or only certain types of—decisions be made in this way?
   c. If consensus cannot be reached, what process will the team follow? (See below for a way to make non-consensus decisions.)
   d. What level of evidence or support will the team need to make a decision?

---

[1] National Institute of Corrections (NIC), 1993.
[2] See 1f: Setting Ground Rules.

e. What will happen when team members are absent from a meeting? Will decisions be made or held until all members are present?

3. Once agreement is made on the issues above, designate someone to record the agreed-upon decision making guidelines. These should be included in your policy team's charter, along with your team's ground rules.

Possible Process for Making Non-Consensus Decisions
When consensus is not possible, your team may agree to a voting process. For example, policy team members might vote using their thumbs (or some other signal the team agrees to) to indicate

- "I fully and completely support this decision" (thumbs up);
- "I do not fully and completely support this decision (i.e., there are some things about it I would prefer were different) but I can live with it" (thumbs horizontal); or
- "I cannot support this decision" (thumbs down).

The team can move forward with a decision as long as there are no "thumbs down's." That is, everyone on the team must completely support the decision or agree to "live with it" in order for the decision to be made.

In cases where one or more team member cannot support the decision (thumbs down), engage those team members in a dialogue about what the team would have to do in order to create a situation where everyone could live with the decision.

Tips
Consider the following tips when working with your team to come to agreement or to make a decision:

- There may be some instances where different decision making methods are used. Ensure that team members are aware of the decision making "mode" prior to entering into discussions about decisions.
- In order to arrive more quickly at consensus, use facts and information—not opinions or beliefs—as the basis of conversation. An alternative approach is to provide an allotted amount of time for team members to express opinions and beliefs; when time is up, restrict the discussion to factual information.
- Recognize the difference between disagreement and conflict. Disagreements are healthy; they force the group to consider different options and select the best course of action. Disagreements turn to conflict when team members get emotionally attached to issues or positions, sometimes resulting in personal attacks on other team members. Encourage your team to "stay professional" by keeping their comments and criticisms focused on work items and processes, not the persons involved. [3]

---

[3] SMART Technologies, 2004.

Example: Eau Claire County, Wisconsin, Decision Making Guidelines

The policy team has agreed on the following guidelines for decision making:
- All members have equal status for the purposes of input and decision making.
- Team members are allowed to send a designee if they are unable to attend a scheduled meeting. Communication of this must be made in writing to the chair prior to the scheduled meeting date.
- Decisions will be reached by consensus whenever possible and team members will use the consensus decision rule:
  - I am at least 70% comfortable with or in favor of the decision, and I will be 100% committed to it.
  - I am 60% comfortable with the decision, but still have reservations and need more information. I am responsible for finding the information I need.
  - I am less than 50% comfortable with the decision. I am responsible for presenting an alternative solution.
- Even though the EBDM policy team has no legal authority to force any changes in the criminal justice system at any of its points, justice stakeholders impliedly agree and consent that they will give great deference to a consensus decision of the entire EBDM policy team. Although individual justice stakeholders still retain their statutory and constitutional prerogative to exercise their discretion, they impliedly agree that if they decline to consider or implement a recommended practice or procedure, they will articulate clear and specific reasons explaining why, in good conscience, they will not consider or implement the consensus decision.

Example: Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, Decision Making Guidelines

All members have equal status for the purposes of input and decision making.

Whenever possible, decisions will be reached by consensus, whether members are present at a scheduled meeting or not. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions shall be made as follows:
- A proponent of the decision shall make a motion which shall be stated in a meeting agenda issued at least three business days in advance of a meeting.
- The motion may be put to a vote at the meeting if a quorum is present; a quorum shall consist of at least eight members of the policy team.
- A motion shall carry if a majority of the policy team members present at the meeting vote in favor.

Decisions of the policy team are subject to legal limitations on the authority of any agency with a representative on the policy team. However, a decision of the policy team binds the representative to make a good faith effort to use their authority to implement the decision or persuade their agency to authorize the necessary action or seek the necessary authority.

Additional Resources/Readings

CEPP. (2006). The role of facilitators and staff in supporting collaborative teams. Retrieved from http://www.collaborativejustice.org/docs/The%20Role%20of%20Facilitators%20and%20Staff%20in%20Supporting%20Collaborative%20Teams.pdf

———. (2010). Coaching packet: Establishing a rational planning process. Retrieved from http://www.cepp.com/documents/Establishing%20a%20Rational%20Planning%20Process.pdf

SMART Technologies. (2004). Minimize meeting mutiny. Retrieved from http://www.effectivemeetings.com/teams/difficult/meeting_mutiny.asp

———. (2004). Using group process techniques to improve meeting effectiveness. Retrieved from http://www.effectivemeetings.com/teams/teamwork/creighton.asp

Woodward, B. (1993). Establishing and maintaining the policy team. In National Institute of Corrections, *The intermediate sanctions handbook: Experiences and tools for policymakers* (pp. 27–34). Retrieved from http://nicic.gov/library/000213