“Building Consensus: The Key to Group Decision Making in Your SGA”

Presented by: Luke Gorham
What is Consensus Building?
Dictionary Definition

According to Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary consensus building is defined as:

1. A general agreement
2. The judgment arrived at by most of those concerned
3. Group solidarity in sentiment and belief
Definition from *Breaking Robert’s Rules*
by Lawrence E. Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank

- Build **solidarity and agreement broadly across our group** and to get most members to buy into a shared judgment
- **Collectively** you work towards a shared solution
- Trying to find **a better third way** – requires investment and creativity
Six Foundations of Consensus Building

1. Crucial to clarify the responsibilities the people involved have to others they are presumed to speak for
2. Start by clarifying mission, decide what agenda will (and will not) include, set ground rules to guide conversation
3. Group engages in joint fact finding
4. Try to generate agreements that leave everyone better off than they would have been if no agreement had been reached
5. Take a written version of the draft agreement to people or group they represent
6. Think about things that can go wrong as the decision is implemented and consider strategies either to avoid or deal with the concerns
Steps of Consensus Building

1. Convene
2. Assigning Roles and Responsibilities - “Signing-on”
3. Group Problem Solving (may take multiple meetings)
4. Reaching Agreement
5. Holding people to their commitments
Steps of Consensus Building

• 1. Convene
  – Getting the right people to the table
  – If standing group, identifying the right constituents at the table
  – Research to understand substance and context of issue or problem
Steps of Consensus Building

• 2. Assigning Roles and Responsibilities - “Signing-on”
  – Agree upon ground rules
  – Define responsibilities of members
    » Facilitator
    » Scope of effort
    » Timetable
    » Additional information needed
Steps of Consensus Building

• 3. Group Problem Solving (may take multiple meetings)
  – Generate packages, proposals and ideas
  – Identify and collect additional information
  – Share information collected
  – Sharing of perspectives and perceived pros and cons of various solutions and parts of solutions
  – “Inventing” – group members take what they’ve heard and try to create a solution that meets everyone’s needs
Steps of Consensus Building

• **4. Reaching Agreement**
  - Not voting
  - Agreeing to agree
  - One of the “invented” solutions is put forth – “can everyone live with this?”
  - Group members indicate yes or no and explain their position
  - Tweak solution to get everyone to yes
  - Group needs to listen to identify the right modifications
  - Those with concerns need to be clear and honest about concerns and possible revisions
Steps of Consensus Building

5. Holding people to their commitments

- Include agreement on who will do what in plan
- Implementation starts
  » Uninvolved parties question solution – may be good questions or may be lack of understanding
  » Things change from status at beginning of project
  » Plan for anticipated changes
- May need to reconvene to make the agreement better with new or changed information
Group Activity

• “A student senator has brought a proposal to SGA. This person wants to assess the pros and cons of raising the SGA fee $20/semester more than what it currently is ($5 more for the summer semester and interim terms). Your student population is made up of on-campus and off-campus students with 25% of the campus being non-traditional students.” SGA also needs to make the decision on how they will involve the rest of campus in the decision-making process/approval of the fee.
Questions to Answer

1. Who are “the right people” to bring to the table?
2. How did you decide what roles each group member played?
3. How did you share ideas/information to help with the decision making process?
4. Talk about how you reached an agreement?
5. How will you hold members accountable for their tasks/information gathering?
Questions?
Reference

• *Breaking Robert’s Rules* by Lawrence E. Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank
Buy the Book!

• If you are interested in buying the Social Change Model of Leadership Development Guidebook, please visit: https://nclp.umd.edu