

Formal Consensus Meeting Roles

Agenda Planner It is helpful if a group member can fill the Agenda Planner role over several meetings. If the group meets weekly, the Agenda Planner may rotate every one or two months; if the group meets monthly, it may rotate every six months.

Facilitator The facilitator conducts group business and guides the Formal Consensus process so that it flows smoothly. The facilitator is responsible for honoring the agenda contract, and for leading the meeting openly, so that everyone present is aware of the process and how to participate. Facilitators do not give their personal opinions, or attempt to direct the content of the discussion. If they do want to participate, they must clearly relinquish the role, and speak as an individual.

Timekeeper The timekeeper is responsible for keeping the time as the group moves through the agenda. The timekeeper assists the Facilitator to keep within the agreed upon time limits set in the agenda, by keeping everyone aware of how much time is left for discussing a particular item, and giving ample warning when time is running out.

Doorkeeper Doorkeepers are chosen before the meeting, as they must arrive early enough to set up handouts or literature needed for the meeting, help arrange the physical layout (chairs, make coffee, etc.) and receive any last minute information from the Facilitator. Before the meeting the Doorkeeper welcomes people, distributes handouts, and informs them of any pertinent information. After the meeting begins, the Doorkeeper explains briefly to latecomers what has happened, and where the meeting is currently on the agenda.

Notetaker The Notetaker is responsible for recording what happened during the meeting. It is vitally important, so that members who are absent can participate in future work and meetings, and to settle disputes of memory or verify past decisions. The Notetaker can be a proactive role, for example noticing that the last 5 speakers have all been men, or young. Each group needs to decide how to use the Notetaker, depending on the group's culture and style. In large groups it may be helpful to have two Notetakers.

Public Scribe The Public Scribe is responsible for writing publicly information for the whole group to see. Typically the Scribe will try to capture the essence of what a person is saying, rather than a full, word for word record. In large groups it is very useful to have two Scribes, so that one can be finishing writing down what the last speaker has said, while the second Scribe can begin attending to and writing down what the next speaker is saying.

Peacekeeper The Peacekeeper is responsible to paying attention to the overall mood of the meeting. Someone who is not personally invested in the topic under discussion is a good choice for Peacekeeper. When tensions increase dramatically, the Peacekeeper interrupts briefly to remind the group of its common goal and commitment to cooperation. Often the Peacekeeper will call for a moment of silence, to allow people to reflect on the goals of the group and/or the topic under discussion, or introduce a "light and lively." The Peacekeeper is the only person with prior permission to interrupt a speaker or to speak without first being recognized by the Facilitator. Any comments the Peacekeeper makes should be addressed to the whole group, not to a particular individual or small group within the larger group. Keep comments short and to the point; it is also appropriate to acknowledge when the group did something well.

Advocate The role of Advocate is used when, because of strong emotions, someone is unable to be understood. The Advocate and the upset individual would step outside the meeting, to discuss one on one why the person is upset. The goal is for the person to make clear to the Advocate what their concern is, and how it relates to the best interest of the group. While they are conversing, the rest of the group may take a break, or move on to another agenda item. The Advocate then presents the concern so that the group can hear it without the emotional charge.

Formal Consensus Advocate The Formal Consensus Advocate is experience with ATI's use of the Formal Consensus Process. During the Membership Council Meetings, if the Facilitator requests assistance, the Formal Consensus Advocate will assist individual members who are unfamiliar with the Process. An individual member may also request the assistance of the Formal Consensus Advocate. In both cases, the Formal Consensus Advocate and the member will leave the meeting to discuss the question about the process. When they return, the Doorkeeper will let them know what has transpired while they were gone.

Meetings using Formal Consensus use most if not all of the following roles.

Source: On Conflict and Consensus: a handbook on Formal Consensus Decision Making, by C.T. Lawrence Butler and Amy Rothstein. Food Not Bombs Publishing, 1-800-569-4054