Tab 9 ~

Decision-Making in PACs, DPACs, and School Planning Councils

In this **Tab 9**, you will find

Decision-Making in PACs, DPACs, and School Planning Councils

> ☑ Important sections of the School Act can be found in **Tab 2**, **The BC School Act**.

The roles and responsibilities of PACs, DPACs, and school planning councils are defined in the School Act and, in the case of PACs and DPACs, in their constitution and bylaws.[1]

PACs and DPACs created under the School Act are autonomous organizations. This means they are able to govern their own affairs and determine their own procedure.

The School Act contains specific requirements for PAC and DPAC bylaws: PACs and DPACs must make bylaws governing their meetings and the business and conduct of their affairs.[2] Many school districts have policies with implications for PACs and DPACs that parents should be aware of.

School planning councils are governed by the School Act and school and district policies. Many of these policies address SPC procedure. On matters not covered by the Act or policy, SPCs are able to determine their own procedure. SPCs are not required to make bylaws.

For requirements of the School Act for PAC and DPAC bylaws, see **Tab 6**, **Constitutions and Bylaws**, page 3.

Quality Decision-Making[3]

> The success of a meeting is ultimately measured by the quality of the decisions made in it.
>
> *Eli Mina, The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings*

One of the measures of a successful organization is the quality of the decisions it makes. Quality decisions

- are in the organization's best interests, consistent with its mandate
- are logical, wise, responsible, and compelling
- take into account the needs of the organization's members and the people it serves
- are made after consideration of all relevant information
- are made after considering their short and long-term impact
- reflect creative and courageous thinking
- solve real problems.

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[1] PACs and DPACs registered under the Society Act are subject to the requirements of that Act.
[2] School Act, s. 8(5) for PACs, and s. 8.5(2) for DPACs.
[3] This information is adapted from Eli Mina, *The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings.* AMACOM 2000

Quality decisions are made in an atmosphere of *openness*, *listening*, and *collaboration*.

✓ In an *open* atmosphere, members come with an open mind, participate equally and fairly, and learn from others.

✓ Members *listen*, knowing that a diversity of opinions makes the organization stronger.

✓ Members *collaborate*, knowing that collective decision-making is not about winning and losing, but about making the best decisions for the entire organization.

Models of Decision-Making

> Instead of you against me, can we work on the basis of you and me against the problem?
>
> *Eli Mina, The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings*

There are three basic models of decision-making:

- consensus
- majority-based
- autocratic.

All three models are used by organizations at various times, and sometimes in combination. Each model has its appropriate use and, if used properly, can facilitate effective decision-making.

Consensus

"Consensus" means "general agreement" or "the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned".[4]

Consensus is interpreted in various ways, as

- a broad level of agreement
- unanimous support of a decision
- the point at which each member is prepared to either support the decision or stand aside and not block it (accepting it as a compromise).

Consensus is often used to approve minutes and reports. It can also be used for complex issues, such as supporting a new program in the school or district. It is especially appropriate when a decision needs broad-based support.

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[4] Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

Majority-based

Parliamentary procedure is based on this model—one member, one vote, and a decision requires more than half the votes cast. Most decisions can be made using this model. It is an inclusive and practical approach that most people are familiar with.

Autocratic

Under this model, one person is given or assumes unilateral power to make a decision without consulting others.

This approach is appropriate for routine and purely administrative decisions. It may be used for urgent decisions when there is no time to consult members or build consensus. Members should be notified of the decision as soon as practicable.

Models of Decision-Making

Adapted from Eli Mina, *The Complete Handbook of Business Meetings*
AMACOM 2000. Pages 25-27

Model	Pros	Cons	Appropriate Situations
Consensus (more than a simple majority)	▪ Broad support for an initiative is generated ▪ The decisions reflect a broad spectrum of views and are more likely to endure ▪ Decisions are viewed as legitimate and are less likely to be undermined	▪ Time consuming, slow ▪ Risk of being blocked or undermined by the minority ▪ Risk of a proposal being so diluted (to accommodate all interests) that it becomes meaningless	▪ Complex or controversial initiatives where time is available, and it is important to get more than a simple majority to endorse and support the initiative
Majority-based voting	▪ Inclusive, yet efficient ▪ Potentially measured and deliberate ▪ Unanimity is not required and hence disputes can be settled by a vote ▪ If minorities are heard, the decisions are likely to be viewed as legitimate and are therefore more likely to be respected and implemented	▪ Potential for creating winners (majorities) and losers (minorities) ▪ Potential for important decisions being pushed through by impatient majorities, possibly causing "losing minorities" to leave the organization or stay but undermine the implementation	▪ Complex decisions that stand to benefit from broad input ▪ Controversial decisions that affect people and stakeholders in a significant way ▪ Decisions that cannot wait, where the number of options is limited, and a middle ground between positions is hard or impossible to find within the time available ▪ No time is available to obtain much more than a simple majority support for a proposal
Autocratic	▪ Expeditious ▪ Simple	▪ Not inclusive ▪ Lacks the benefit of a broad perspective ▪ Potential for a lack of commitment by followers, or even undermining of the decision by them	▪ Routine, administrative, or non-controversial decisions ▪ Urgent decisions that cannot wait for collective decision-making

Reaching Decisions through Consensus[5]

When decisions must be made, PACs, DPACs, and SPCs strive to take into account the opinions of a diverse school community and make the best decision possible.

Consensus is one of several ways to make an effective decision, with advantages depending on the circumstances.

When to use the consensus process

The essence of the consensus process is participation and respect. The consensus process works best when

> Consensus decision-making can work for many issues.

- members see a reason to participate—they have a common concern
- everyone with an interest in the issue has the opportunity to be involved
- everyone has a basic understanding of, and agrees to, the consensus process. (It is the leader's responsibility to explain the process.)
- everyone has fair and equal access to all information on the issue before or during the discussion
- all members are willing to listen, participate, and assist others to understand the issue
- members are prepared to be flexible and change their opinions after hearing others' views.

When to use another decision-making process

People often prefer the decision-making process they are familiar with and that has worked well for them in the past. The majority-based model will be highly successful in the circumstances listed above. Let your members decide which method to use.

Consider using the majority-based model rather than consensus when

- a number of members indicate they would prefer to use the method they are most familiar with
- the issue is "hot" or urgent
- people or groups appear to have set positions

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[5] This information is adapted from *Reaching decisions through consensus*, BCCPAC's Inclusive PACs and DPACs Series.

- there is disagreement as to which decision-making method to use
- members are not participating
- the discussion is not moving along well, or consensus cannot be reached.

Steps to consensus

1. The issue must be clear to all participants.

Begin by explaining the issue or concern and why it is being discussed at this time. Invite a knowledgeable member or guest to provide clear information.

2. Invite all members to participate in the discussion.

Once the problem is clearly understood, invite possible solutions and encourage all members to join the discussion.

Everyone does not have to speak, but if a member appears anxious, invite them to comment.

Once a satisfactory solution has been reached, discontinue the discussion and move on to the next step unless a new concern arises.

3. Restate the solution.

Clarify the solution to ensure nothing has been overlooked. Ask if anyone has a question regarding the proposal.

4. Ask if there is any opposition.

This is an important step. Although it is assumed that everyone who wished to speak did so, once the decision is restated it is wise to ask for objections.

5. Deal with objections.

If there are objections, they must be worked out or a new solution proposed. Ask the person or persons objecting to propose an alternative.

If the members who do not agree with the decision are clearly in the minority, and it is recognized the solution will work, ask the minority for clarification of their position. There are two options at this point:

> – Members not in full support may *stand aside*—they are not expected to participate in implementing the decision, but they agree not to block others in doing so.
> – The minority *states non-support* within the group— this will not be stated publicly outside the group, and will not be used to block success.

6. **If there are no objections, or you have satisfied them, record the decision in the minutes.**

7. **If no decision can be reached, consider voting on the issue and letting the majority decide.**

> Parents must feel accepted even when their opinion differs from the majority.

Making Majority-Based Decisions

The same atmosphere of *openness*, *listening*, and *collaboration* that leads to consensus-building also leads to good majority-based decisions. All members need

- a reason to participate
- equal opportunity to be involved
- a basic understanding of the process
- fair and equal access to all information on the issue.

With these conditions met, the majority-based process can be highly inclusive and effective for PACs, DPACs, and SPCs.

Respecting the minority

Diversity of opinion can be viewed an asset—different pieces of the truth we need to make a good decision.

Members with a minority viewpoint often contribute valuable information to the discussion of an issue. In a well-run meeting, where everyone has equal opportunity to speak and be heard, these members can come away feeling their opinions were considered and respected, even though they did not prevail. In such an

atmosphere, minority members are more likely to support the majority decision, or at least not undermine it.

Listening to the minority viewpoint also requires the majority to justify their decision. The majority needs to feel that the final decision was made after taking the minority's concerns into account.

Implementing the Decision

An important part of good decision-making, whether by consensus or majority, is to give everyone an opportunity to participate in implementing the decision.

Following the decision (at the same or a later meeting), invite all members to join together in action-planning. This will preserve the support that was achieved for the decision during the decision-making process.

The positive relationships developed within the group during the consensus process or a well-run majority-based process will improve the overall effectiveness of your council.

For more information on meetings and decision-making, see **Tab 14**, **Effective Meetings**.