BUILDING CONSENSUS
for Breakthrough Social Change

"Consensus" is often incorrectly understood to mean "everyone agrees." Rather, consensus is a process that enables all group members an opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, be heard by the group, work towards mutual agreement, and support a final decision that reflects the full participation and best thinking of everyone.

Consensus-Based Decision Making…
⇨ Provides a way to make decisions while maintaining a balance of power.
⇨ Incorporates the best thinking of everyone, yielding better decisions.
⇨ Encourages everyone in the group to have a stake in the decision.
⇨ Allows the minority to have a voice in the process.
⇨ Promotes a spirit of cooperation rather than competition and innovation rather than right vs. wrong.

Consensus is not the right way to make decisions in every situation. A consensus-building process can be especially useful for complex decisions. It also requires enough time to enable true dialogue, active participation and commitment to the process, disciplined speaking and listening, respect for the contributions of every member, and the will and skill to engage in healthy conflict.

Rather than taking a simple yes-no vote, the group tests for consensus by asking each person to "take a stand" and demonstrate their level of support for a decision. Anyone who stands at position 1 must propose realistic ways they could be moved to a 2 or above. No one can shut down the process. After reasonable time for discussion, the decision can go forward with a majority vote as well as a minority report that reflects the feelings of anyone remaining at the 1 position.

I strongly support this decision.	I support this decision.	This decision is okay with me. I can live with it.	I dislike this decision, but I am willing to defer to the wisdom and will of the group.	I do not support this decision. We definitely need to discuss this matter further.
5	4	3	2	1

Levels of Consensus or Gradients of Agreement adapted from COMMUNITY AT WORK