

## **Decision Making in Illuman**

The boards of Illuman chapters and the board of Illuman national are faced with making practical, financial, procedural, and program decisions. In our culture, these kinds of decisions are commonly made in a meeting for business which follows Roberts Rules of Order, or a similar process. This approach can result in resentments for not being heard and lead to “winners and losers” which is at odds with the spirit of inclusiveness and everyone being heard that defines much of the work of Illuman.

This document describes an alternate method of making decisions in a meeting for business called “unanimity”. Unanimity does not mean a unanimous vote. It also does not mean “consensus”, because the word consensus means different things to different people. Unanimity provides for every decision maker to be heard, his/her concerns to be addressed, and questions to be answered.

Unanimity is based on the understanding that “how we make decisions” should take precedence over “getting decisions made.” In practice this means every perspective on a topic is important, even a minority perspective, and every person is important regardless of their role or experience.

While this process draws on the intentions and guidelines of Council, it is not a form of Council as we have practiced it.

### **The Process**

1. Meetings for decision making are held with the help of a “facilitator”. The facilitator can be anyone in the group who is trained in and understands the unanimity method.

The facilitator must be willing to discern and summarize the sense of the group on a topic of discussion and not attempt to sway the outcome in any way because of his/her role. The group shall appoint a facilitator who is willing to be "neutral" in this way. If the topic for discussion is particularly controversial, and the intended facilitator wants to be intimately involved in the discussion and present strong ideas, then this person may not be the best choice for a facilitator. Anyone may decline to be a facilitator, if they feel they cannot be neutral in the discussion. The role of the facilitator shall be:

- a. To ask clarifying questions
- b. To point out information that the group may be missing such as the expertise of a particular member
- c. To see that the guidelines shown below are followed
- d. To discern the sense of the group.

These roles are not exclusive to the facilitator. The facilitator shall encourage anyone in the group to join in these roles.

As the meeting proceeds:

1. A topic for decision is introduced.
2. Discussion follows.
3. When the facilitator senses that a direction of the discussion is emerging and/or a decision is developing, he/she presents a summary of his/her discernment of the sense of the group, and if he/she thinks a decision has been made by the group, he/she describes that decision.

4. The group responds to the statement made by the facilitator either with agreement with the situation as described, or with further discussion.
5. The process continues until all participants are in agreement with the decision described by the facilitator, where upon the facilitator shall ask if there is any further discussion, questions, and objections on the subject. If there is no further discussion, a decision has been made and can be recorded in the minutes.
6. The facilitator shall not rush the decision. It sometimes takes participants time to be ready to raise questions, have additional thoughts, or raise possible objections. A silent period of time while waiting for responses is appropriate.

Guidelines to make this work:

1. Proper advance preparation of the agenda for discussion and decision making
2. A commitment to a power larger than ourselves as a participant in the discussion
3. A humble and loving spirit towards each other
4. A commitment to value the process over the product, action, decision or outcome
5. A willingness to find creative solutions and insights
6. A commitment to the authority of the meeting as a group without second guessing motives.
7. A respect for human leadership
8. Appropriate personal conduct:
  - ☐ Speak from the Heart
  - ☐ Listen from the Heart
  - ☐ Be lean of expression
  - ☐ Be spontaneous
  - ☐ Respect confidentiality
9. Respect for the creative power of dissent without any individual needing to be right.
10. An understanding of the role of written minutes and the need to write down important decisions.
11. A commitment to make no final decision until everyone has been heard who wishes to be heard.

The objection commonly raised about this method of decision making is that one person can hold up a decision indefinitely. This is true, but in practice, if the guidelines above are followed, this rarely happens. The weight of one person being able to hold up the decision results in increased efficiency in the process. If a decision is being held up by one person, there may be important thoughts or ideas that are being missed by the group. If an impasse does occur, continue to bear in mind that each person's contribution is valuable and that the process is more important than the product, action, decision or outcome.

If difficult decisions are not time sensitive, putting them off until the next meeting may give everyone time to find a creative solution or a better understanding. If an impasse occurs with a time sensitive decision, a decision may be made through consensus rather than unanimity. In this context, consensus shall be defined as the will of the group despite any lingering objections, questions, or concerns. However, it should be recognized that this approach constitutes a failure of the spirit of unanimity.

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