



## Preparing for Change & Managing Tensions

# Managing Differences

### Majority Rule vs. Consensus Decision-Making

The work of listening to and working with our neighbours is a dynamic process. You'll be considering many different, and sometimes conflicting ideas and positions, before arriving at decisions. This is true whether your aging in place initiative is new or more established, whether you're making decisions within your group or with members of the wider community. How you make decisions with your community can help or hinder how you manage these diverse viewpoints.

Here is a quick tip sheet of the pros and cons of two of the most common types of decision-making processes that we have used in our aging in place work – by majority rule and by consensus. This resource covers when each can serve your aging in place work, why it is effective, and what the challenges are.

### Majority Rule

Majority Rule is a vote where the winning choice is preferred by more than half of the voters.

Use this when:

Majority rule is effective for making group decisions about specific tasks that require more immediate action. These decisions can be changed or reversed easily, if needed. For example, you may want a quick vote on which community partner to reach out to first or what day and time of the week to hold an event.

## Benefits:

Majority rule decisions can be made quickly and with a simple voting process where every member has equal opportunity to make their choice count. For decisions about specific aging in place activities or programs, a majority rule vote provides a clear snapshot of the interests or preferences of the largest portion of the community.

## Challenges:

A decision by majority rule is not wholly inclusive as there are clear “winners and losers” of the vote. Some community members may feel their views and values are still overlooked or dismissed, despite the vote.

If there are existing conflicts among neighbours in your community, a majority rule decision may deepen these or create new tensions. Also, a majority rule decision does not necessarily promote the kind of shared understanding of decisions that can build cohesion within a community. For your aging in place initiative, these can be significant challenges if your community is divided on more complex issues directly impacting residents’ basic quality of life, such as combatting food insecurity or reaching out to more isolated residents.

## Consensus Decision-making

Consensus decision-making is a process that requires building trust and gaining the confidence of a community. This kind of decision-making occurs over a number of group discussions where everyone's opinions are heard and understood, and solutions are created that respect those opinions.

## Use this when:

For your aging in place initiative, this process is particularly valuable for more complex decisions with larger groups or communities. The motivation is to find shared understanding among community members, rather than to change each other’s minds. It requires listening to connect as collaborators rather than listening to confront as adversaries.

We have learned (and championed in our workbooks!) the value of taking time to listen to connect and to build relationships with community for aging in place work.

### Benefits:

Because the process is rooted in cooperation, everyone can feel involved, heard, and can contribute to the decision. This process can be thoughtful, making space for holding tensions and differences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. What can result are creative solutions that can address all concerns and promote greater commitment and acceptance by community members.

### Challenges:

Consensus decision-making takes time. Keep in mind that, even if you don't reach a point where everyone is in perfect agreement about next steps, this needn't derail action. You can still aim to align in support and curiosity about outcomes, despite lingering differences. For your aging in place work, building trust and curiosity with community members so they feel free to support as they are able will be the more attainable goal.