



## Group Decision Tip

*E-mailed every two weeks to help groups make good decisions*

### Rules First

**In principle**, it is best to make the rules before taking the field, before starting the meeting. When we decide *how* we are going to make decisions before we find ourselves in the tension of making them, it lowers our chances of conflict. It is much easier to establish proposal-development steps and decision criteria in the hypothetical rather than when actually confronted with a real proposal and with real personalities.

"We'll figure out the rules as we go," rarely turns out fair and often leads to conflict and resentment.

Establishing rules of engagement beforehand lets everyone know what to expect, gives everyone equal opportunity to participate, and increases chances of creative, peaceful decisions.

**Practical Tip:** Before you get to the hard decisions, first establish who gets to vote and who does not, how proposals get developed and discussed, and norms of behavior for meetings. For many groups, such rules are embodied in bylaws and meeting ground rules. Imagine the tough situations before they arrive and decide in advance how they will be handled.

Establishing and enforcing rules does not limit creativity, but rather encourages it. Knowing what to expect gives us courage to fully participate.

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