

the Committee wishing to speak must get permission from the presenters, so the plenary can more easily focus on the proposal.

2. The presenters explain the proposal, including how concerns were addressed in Committee, if the proposal reached consensus there or was voted on.

3. Time is taken for qualifying questions so that all delegates have a common understanding of what the Committee is proposing. Concerns will be discussed later.

Stage Two: Resolving Concerns

1. If the presenters have discussed concerns brought up in Committee and how the proposal was altered or explained to address these concerns, there may not be any further concerns brought up on the plenary floor. The facilitator should now ask if there are any concerns with the proposal as stated. Those with unresolved concerns should raise their hands, signalling the need for further discussion.

2. Concerns are listed in front of the group. Delegates must avoid repeating concerns once listed - in consensus, a concern is evaluated on its value, not on how many people share the concern. Two types of concerns will be listed at this point:

a. Concerns already discussed in Committee. Delegates raising these must explain why the Committee's solution is not satisfactory.

b. New, unforeseen concerns.

3. The presenters have the time to address concerns one at a time, attempting to explain the proposal or modify it to address the concerns to the delegate's satisfaction. If the presenters cannot resolve the concern, others in the plenary may suggest remedies. Consensus works best in a large group if people work together to resolve concerns creatively. If a concern can be addressed satisfactorily, the scribe will erase or line it out from the list.

4. If all concerns seem to be resolved, the facilitator will ask if there are any unresolved concerns and any stand-asides. If not, consensus is declared and noted in minutes. Concerned delegates may stand aside and enter a formal dissent with the note-takers.

5. If there are unresolved concerns and still time on the agenda, the presenters may enter into a more extended discussion with concerned delegates to resolve the issue.

Stage Three: Closing Options

Sometimes time runs out before all concerns can be addressed. The presenters have the first right to suggest a closing option. Closing options include:

1. **Contract for more time.** This includes a proposal for where time

can be deducted from the existing agenda. Since the agenda is a contract the group has already spent tremendous time coming to consensus upon, any objection to extending time cancels this option automatically.

2. **Withdrawal of the proposal.**

3. **Referral of proposal to small group.** This could be the Committee of origin or an ad hoc group comprising all persons interested in affecting the outcome.

4. **Straw poll.** A non-binding show of hands can often show the extent to which a proposal is flawed. If the vast majority of the delegates are happy with the proposal, the concerned delegates may feel more comfortable in standing aside. If many delegates share unresolved concerns, a proposal may need more work in a small group.

5. **Vote.** A binding vote is taken only upon the presenters' request. Votes in plenary are roll call votes taken by region after a brief caucus period. If 20% of the votes are abstentions, the proposal fails. If fewer than 20% are abstentions, an 80% vote is required to pass policy or change Bylaws. A two-thirds vote is required for business or procedural items. When in doubt, the higher percentage is required. (One note on the metaphysics of voting: since abstentions are currently deducted from the total vote when percentages are calculated, they count as "yes" votes. Due to the 20% abstention rule, however, they can often defeat a proposal better than "no" votes.)

Plenary decision-making process can be bewildering and painful, especially if emotions are high, delegates with concerns do not feel listened to and a vote fails to go in the desired direction.

In the politics of the new paradigm, we are striving to replace "debate" with "dialogue." The biggest problem with our consensus process is that we are using an essentially cooperative process but still trying to compete.

To avoid bewilderment or frustration, it is highly recommended that regions with critical concerns about a proposal make their ideas known in advance of a statewide meeting and in the Committee process.

Plenary floor debates and votes can be turned into dialogues and consensus by spending time in Committee or informal caucus. If you are in a delegation from a region, sit together and allow the more seasoned delegates to explain things as they progress.

One final note on consensus: it is a two-way street between the group and the individual. The group has the responsibility to respect and listen to delegates and their input. The delegates, likewise, have the responsibility to prepare in advance and speak from humility rather than misguided self-importance.