

# Committees

Statewide Committees play a crucial role in building statewide consensus. Like the committees in the state or federal legislature, our Standing Committees are the microcosm for the state. It is in Committee - not on the plenary floor - where issues and proposals can be adequately discussed.

The current Standing Committees include Alliance-Building, Bylaws, Campaigns & Candidacies, Finance & Fundraising, Goals & Strategy, Initiatives, Internal Communication, International Working Group, Media, Platform and the Coordinating Committee. All of these Committees were approved in a plenary session and any creation or dissolution of Committees must also gain plenary approval.

The Standing Committees have the task of culling input from Green locals and regions and making proposals or presentations to the plenary body. They may also meet or implement projects between statewide gathering and in many ways work autonomously under the direction of Committee-approved facilitators. Each Committee has a designated liaison to the coordinating Committee who keeps the other Coordinating Committee reps apprised of that Committee's progress.

Committee meetings at the statewide are open to anyone, but distinctions have been made between "active" and "inactive" members. For the sake of continuity, only members who have attended at least two consecutive meetings and have completed any assignments are considered active for purposes of decision-making. Members do not have to be delegates.

While newcomers and others are welcomed and encouraged to attend, observe and even comment in meetings, final decisions are made by the active membership.

Each Committee operates on an informal consensus process in which all germane concerns regarding a proposal are heard and considered. This is the place to create the best possible proposal, one that takes into consideration the collective wisdom of various locals.

If reaching consensus is not easy, the Committee may go through the decision-making steps used in the plenary (more on this later.) Make sure that each Committee discusses briefly its purpose and individual decision-making process at the beginning of each working session.

It is important that every region field someone who can work on each Committee. This person can keep the local Greens informed on Committee deliberations and transmit any input from the local to the state body.

Each Committee has a conference on EcoNet, a sophisticated computer bulletin board. EcoNet provides a forum for dialogue throughout the state and around the globe. Committees can work between statewide plenaries via EcoNet, meet at statewide gatherings or hold their own meetings.

# Consensus

Consensus is a lot like tofu: we all can talk about its virtues but often find it hard to stomach. The fact is the Green Party of California encourages consensus at a local level but has all but abandoned it at the state level.

Green Party plenary decision-making process has gone through many revisions, but has always tried to "seek consensus" while offering an 80% voting back-up. Simply stated, the statewide process is a voting model using consensus-building techniques, not a consensus model using voting techniques.

There were originally good reasons for this. First, consensus had never been adequately defined or uniformly taught in the Green Committees of Correspondence. Plenary sessions of the Inter-regional Committee were constantly plagued by differences over process. People who spent any time at national GCoC meetings were burned out on this so-called consensus process.

Second, consensus requires a lot of time. Proposals must be adequately discussed and reshaped to address legitimate concerns. Statewide gatherings do not provide this kind of time.

Third, consensus is best built on a foundation of trust. Since the composition of statewide gatherings changes from meeting to meeting, having a genuine trust in Committee or on the plenary floor is not always possible - or justified.

Many of the early shapers of the Green Party felt it was asking too much of the statewide plenary to operate on consensus and a voting process (albeit "consensus-seeking") was adopted.

This process was given a new shot of consensus technique at the San Diego 1991 statewide, at which the present Bylaw on decision-making was adopted. This version of consensus, which is outlined in greater detail in *Consensus for Greens*, has three stages of discussion towards reaching consensus. If consensus is not reached, the proposing Committee may request a number of options, one of which is a roll-call vote.

Taking a vote is only one of the options the proposers can request. It is not inevitable.

Here's how it works:

## Stage One: The Proposal

1. A proposal is brought to the plenary for decision by one of the Standing Committees. Since the Committee has discussed the proposal for months and solicited input from all quarters of the state, the underlying presumption of the plenary is that the proposal should pass if at all possible. A person or team from the Committee acts as the presenter, a floor manager for the Committee's block of time. Any other members of