Steps for Reaching a Concensus

http://www.wikihow.com/Reach-a-Consensus

1. Understand the principles of consensus decision making. There are five requirements of consensus decision-making:

- Inclusion. As many community members as possible should be involved in the process. Nobody should be excluded or left out (unless they ask to be excluded).
- Participation. Not only is every person included, but each and every person is also expected to participate by contributing opinions and suggestions. While there are various roles that others may have, each person has an equal share (and stake) in the final decision.
- Co-operation. All the people involved collaborate and build upon each other's concerns and suggestions to come up with a decision or solution that will satisfy everyone in the group, rather than just the majority (while the minority is ignored).
- Egalitarianism. Nobody's input is weighed more or less than anyone else's. Each has equal opportunity to amend, veto, or block ideas.
- Solution-mindedness. An effective decision-making body works towards a common solution, despite differences. This comes through collaboratively shaping a proposal until it meets as many of the participants' concerns as possible.

2. Understand the benefits of using a consensus process. Consensus decision making involves a collaborative discussion, rather than an adversarial debate. Thus a consensus process is more likely to result in all parties reaching common ground. The benefits include:

- Better decisions- because all perspectives in the group are taken into account. The resulting proposals are therefore able to address all the concerns affecting the decision as much as possible.
- Better group relationships- through collaborating rather than competing, group members are able to build closer relationships through the process. Resentment and rivalry between winners and losers is minimized.
- Better implementation of decisions- When widespread agreement is achieved and everyone has participated in the process there is usually strong levels of cooperation in

follow through. There are not likely to be disgruntled losers who might undermine or passively sabotage effective implementation of the group's decision.

3. Decide how your group will finalize a decision. A consensus process allows a group to generate as much agreement as possible. Some groups require everyone to consent if a proposal is to be passed. Other groups, however, allow decisions to be finalized without unanimous consent. Often a super-majority is deemed sufficient. Some groups use a simple majority vote or the judgment of a leader. They can still use a consensus process to come up with their proposals, regardless of how they finalize a decision. There are several options:

- Required Unanimity
- One Dissenter (also called U-1, or Unanimity minus one) means that all participants support the decision *except* for one. The individual dissenter usually can't block the decision, but may be able to prolong debate (like the infamous filibuster). Due to their skepticism of the decision, the lone dissenter makes a very good evaluator of the outcome of the decision because they can view it with a critical eye and spot negative consequences before others would.
- Two Dissenters (U-2 or Unanimity minus two) also can't block a decision, but they are more effective at prolonging debate and obtaining a third dissenter (in which case a decision usually *can* be blocked) if they agree on what is wrong with the proposal.
- Three Dissenters (U-3 or Unanimity minus three), is recognized by most groups as enough to constitute non-consensus, but this can vary between decision-making bodies (especially if it is a small group).
- Rough Consensus doesn't specifically define "how much is enough". The working group leader or even the group itself must decide when a consensus has been reached (although this can create additional disagreement when consensus cannot be reached about coming to a consensus). This places increased responsibility on the leader and can stir further debate if the leader's judgment is questioned.
- Super-majority (can range from 55% to 90%)
- Simple Majority
- Referred to a committee or leader for final ruling.

4. Understand what it means to give consent. Consenting to a proposal does not necessarily mean it is your first choice. Participants are encouraged to think about the good of the whole group. This may mean accepting a popular proposal even if it is not your personal preference. In consensus decision making participants voice their concerns during the discussion so that their ideas can be included. In the end, however, they often decide to accept the best effort of the group rather than create factions or an "us against them" mentality.

5. Clearly outline what needs to be decided. You may need to add something or take something away. You may need to start something new or amend something current. Whatever it is, make sure that the entire issue is clearly stated for everyone to understand. It's always a good idea to address why the issue is being raised in the first place (i.e. what is the problem that needs to be solved?). Briefly review the options that are available.

6. List all the concerns participants want their proposal to address. This sets the groundwork for collaboratively developing a proposal that most people will support.

7. Test the waters. Before attempting a lengthy discussion, take a straw poll to see how much support a proposal idea has. If everyone agrees on a position, move on to finalizing and implementing the decision. If there is disagreement, discuss the concerns that are not yet met by the proposal. Then adapt the proposal, if possible, to make it more broadly agreeable. Sometimes a solution is reached by finding a middle ground between all parties. Even better,however, is when a proposal is shaped to meet as many needs as possible (win-win) rather than through compromise. Remember, to listen to each and every dissenter in the effort to get full agreement.

8. Apply your final decision rule. After a strong attempt has been made to get full agreement, poll the group to find out if the support in the group is sufficient to pass the proposal. The threshold of support necessary depends on the group's choice of decision rule. The decision rule used by your group should be decided well in advance of any contentious proposal being brought before it for consensus-building. See step #3.

9. Implement the decision.