

Empowering Effective Decision Making on Nonprofit Boards

Minnesota Association of Library Friends

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Our Mission

Fuel the effectiveness of nonprofits with guidance, expertise and capital.



Nonprofits are
champions of good.

We are
champions of nonprofits.

Agenda for Today

- Types of Decisions
- Considerations
- Approaches to Decision Making
- Examples and Tools

Why Decision-Making Matters for Boards

Poor decisions = Risk

Slow decisions = Missed opportunities

Strong process = Better impact

Poll

- What decision-making process does your board currently use?
 - Majority rule
 - Avoid decision making
 - 1 or 2 people dominate the process
 - Consensus
 - Strict adherence to Robert's Rules

Types of Decisions

Types of Board Decisions



Formal Actions

More formal
Higher authority
Less frequent



Oversight and Compliance

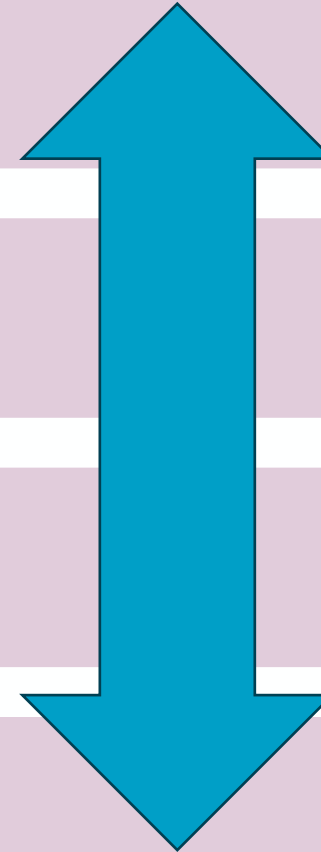


Implementation



Recommendations

More frequent
More advisory



Laying the Groundwork

Clarify the Decision- *What **exactly** is being decided?*

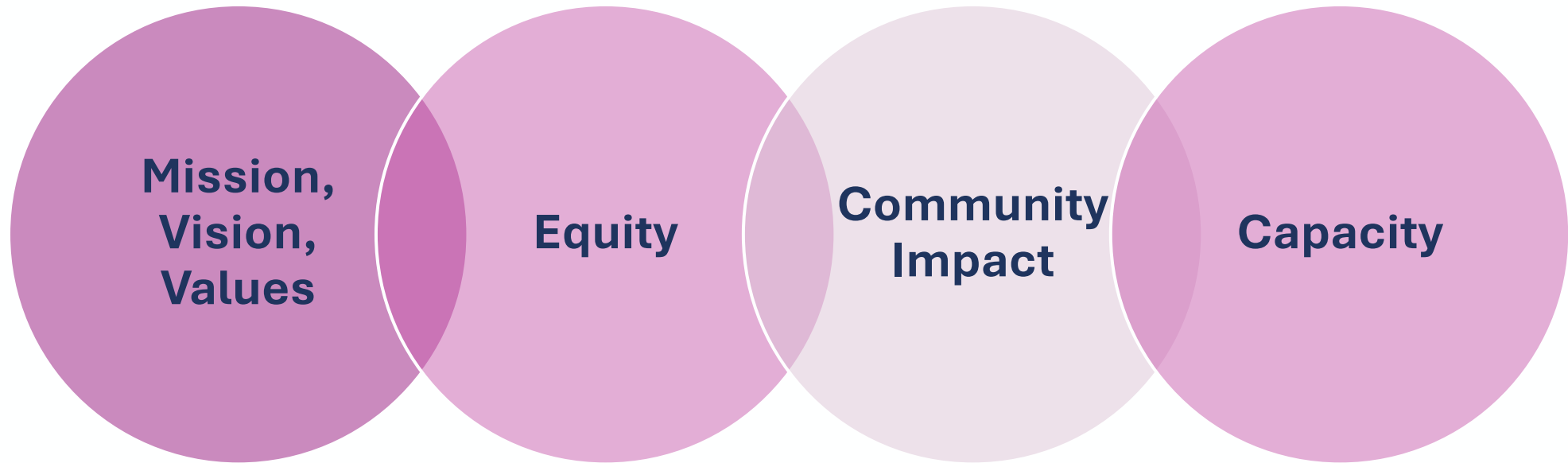
Define the Process

- What is the timeline/deadline for deciding?
- Who will be responsible for this decision?
- Who will be consulted?
- Who has final authority?

Are there other considerations?

Considerations

Considerations



Considerations

How strongly related is this decision to our Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Direction?

Will the decision detract from other, higher priorities for the organization?

How will our Mission, Vision, Values be impacted if we don't make any decision?



**Mission,
Vision,
Values**

Considerations

Who (individuals, roles/identities, communities) will be most impacted by the decision?

Are there invisible costs to the decision/impact by any individuals, identities, communities?

Are there invisible or unintended benefits to any group or identity?

Will this decision cause harm?



Equity

Considerations

Has the community indicated this is an important decision? Does it respond to community needs?

How will this decision impact those we serve and/or our community partners?

Will this decision expand or limit our ability to be present in a concrete way?



**Community
Impact**

Considerations

What are the realistic costs?

What are financial constraints/boundaries?

What is the long-term financial investment?

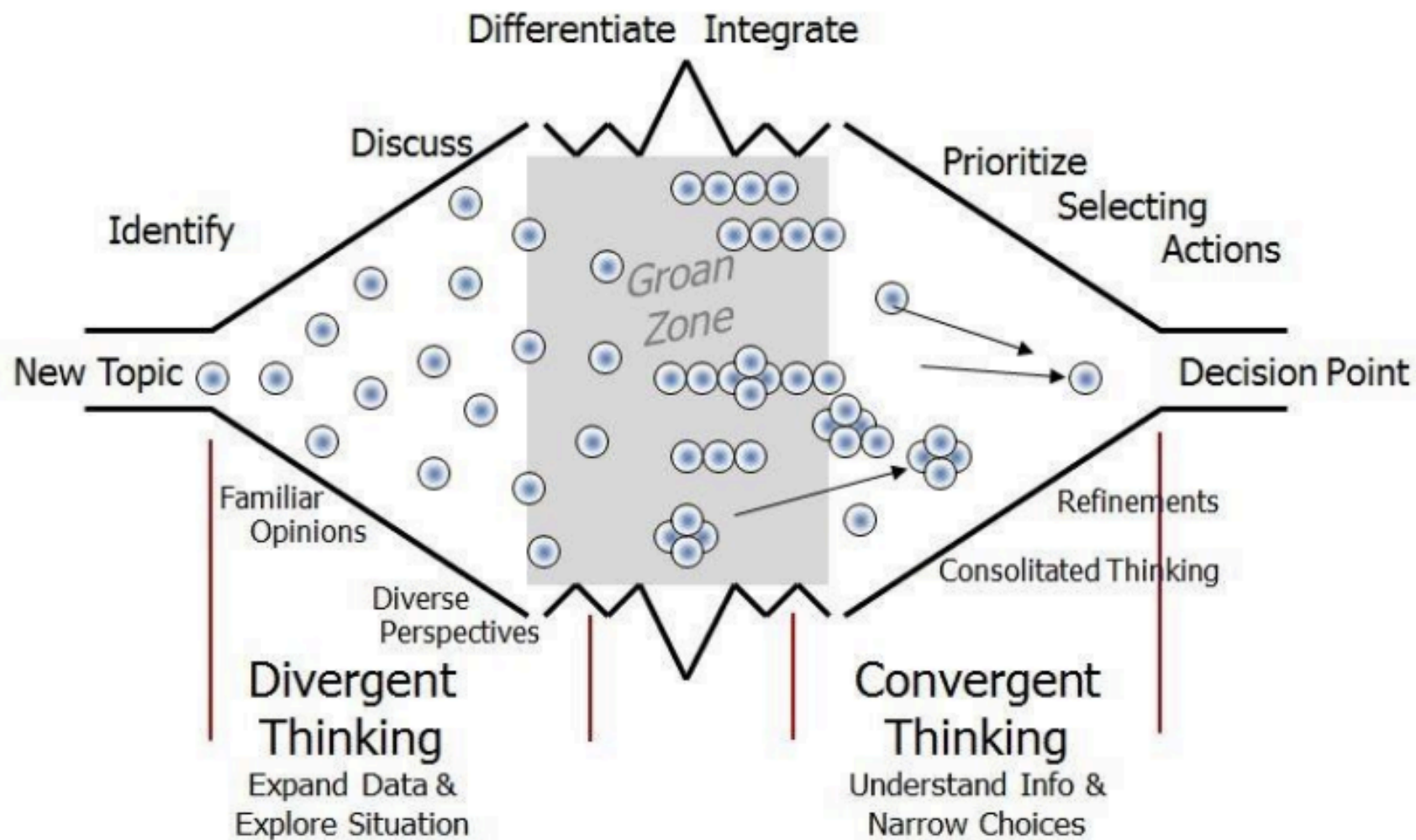
Are the timeline and workloads realistic?

How does the decision impact other timelines or workflow?



Capacity

Dynamics of Group Decision Making



Practice and Policy

PRACTICE

- “the way we do things”
- No formally adopted agreement/expectation
- No legal accountability
- Relies heavily on personalities, moods, and attitudes

POLICY

- Practices that have been formally adopted by the organization
- Predictability and comfort
- Provides accountability

In situations where there is a conflict between “what is done” and the policy, the policy wins.

Rethinking Robert's Rules: When Do They Help (or Hurt)?

What Robert's Rules Can Do Well?

- Create structure and clear procedures
- Ensure fairness in large or formal meetings
- Provide a consistent way to vote and record decisions

Where They Fall Short

- Can limit open, generative discussion
- May privilege those familiar with the rules
- Can feel rigid or slow for complex decisions
- May not reflect all cultural approaches to decision making



Poll

- Are your practice and policy in alignment?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sort of

Approaches to Decision Making

Make No Decision

**Decide and
Announce**

**Gather Input and
Decide**

**Small Group
Decision**

**Large Group
Decision**

**Consensus
Based/Modified
Consensus**

**Ask Someone
Else**

**Testing an
Approach Instead
of Deciding in
Advance**

Examples & Tools

Dealing with Indecision



Use the Mission, Vision and Values as guideposts



Make sure board members feel comfortable asking questions to gain clarity



Ensure that a conflict resolution process is in place



Be clear about the impact of indecision



Emphasize the value of balancing caution with risk



Highlight when movement and decision are more important than consensus

Modified Consensus

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
100% in agreement!	Agreement, w/ minor point of contention	Support with reservations	Abstain	More discussion needed.	Don't like, but will support.	Serious disagreement	Veto
<i>"I really like this."</i>	<i>"It's not perfect, but it's good enough."</i>	<i>"I can live with this."</i>	<i>"This issue doesn't impact me."</i>	<i>"I don't understand this well enough yet."</i>	<i>"It's not great, but I don't want to hold up the group."</i>	<i>"I am NOT on board. Do not count on my support."</i>	<i>"I block this - we need to start over."</i>

Consider the proposal at hand. Consider where you are on the scale. If you have reservations, please be ready to share what the group could change to help you move down the scale.

Modified Consensus

All board members indicate **agreement or disagreement**

Register dissent without blocking the decision

If blocked, options for the way forward:

- Make no decision in the absence of agreement
- Create opportunities for further dialogue
- Modify the proposal to reflect concerns raised
- Give members the option to “opt out”



3 Things to Do at your Next Board Meeting

- Clarify 1 decision using the checklist
- Identify where policy and practice do not align
- Choose a decision-making approach intentionally

Thank you!

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