

GUIDELINES

for the Los Angeles / Orange County Urban Forest Council

1. Involve all interested parties and provide meeting notes and agendas to all identified organizations and individuals. Make periodic person-to-person communication with uninvolved but important stakeholders.
2. Have all committees send out notes that, at a minimum, record who attended, what decisions were made, and whether they were made by consensus or by vote.
3. Develop a communication process that provides interested parties with access to important information in a timely manner. Use an email listserv and a website.
4. Agree on the step-by-step process for reaching consensus and how a fallback voting process will occur if consensus cannot be reached and a decision must be made.
5. Agree on policies for when committees can make decisions on their own without being reviewed by the Steering Committee.

Proposed Step-by-Step Process for Reaching Consensus at Meetings of the Council

1. A proposal is developed by sub-committees and placed before the steering committee for consideration. It is always best for the proposal to develop via subcommittee or email beforehand so that when the council formally considers it, it has as many consensuses built into it as possible. All proposals (whether developed at meetings or by individuals) should arise from a growing foundation of previous, consensus-based decisions and meet the goals and priority strategies of the effort.
 - a. Committees, such as the Annual Event Committee can make decisions without having to bring them back to the Steering Committee, if decisions fall within the strategic plan or other guidelines previously approved by the Steering Committee.
2. The facilitator or chair of the committee helps clarify the proposal and then asks who might have serious objections. If key interest groups are not at the table, everyone present should put themselves in the place of the missing stakeholders and ask the questions they would ask. Once serious objections are clarified and listed, the group is asked to address the objections or develop a new or variation of the proposal. If possible, documentation of objections and resolutions should be recorded.
3. When a proposal advances to the stage when all serious objections are addressed, friendly amendments and other minor changes are made. The

questions who, what, when, where, how and why should be answered at that time or delegated to a committee to finalize.

4. The facilitator or chair should then ask participants to either support with an Aye voice vote, or hearing no objection, pass the proposal as amended.
5. Meeting notes should clearly document the decisions that were made at the meeting. Draft notes should go out to all meeting participants and everyone on the mailing list.
6. If participants at a meeting cannot reach consensus in the time available at the meeting, the facilitator or chair should suspend the discussion and a vote can be called and the fallback voting process will occur.
7. If no deadline is pending, an ad hoc committee of proponents and dissenters of the proposal should be organized and a meeting or conference call scheduled while everyone is still at the meeting. The issue should then be placed on the agenda of a future committee meeting.

Proposed Step-by-Step Process for Fallback Voting

1. A proposal has been advancing and a decision must be made, but not everyone can accept the proposal as presented. The facilitator, chair or any member of the committee requests a formal vote on the proposal.
2. Before advancing, the facilitator or chair calls for a vote to determine if a majority support “calling the question” and pursuing the fallback voting process. A simple majority (51%) carries and debate does not continue on the issue.
3. With the “question” successfully called, the facilitator or chair asks for any reasons why a vote should not occur at this time. Everyone who wishes is permitted to speak. At this time, speakers should not speak on the value of the proposal, only on whether or not the decision must be made at this meeting.
4. After first hearing from participants arguing for delay, other participants are given an opportunity to provide clarifications or differing facts.
5. After everyone is heard on the timing of the decision, the facilitator or chair clarifies the proposal and a vote is taken. If less than 20 people are attending the meeting, an 80% supermajority must be reached for the motion to pass. (e.g. if 10 people attend a meeting, three people can block the decision.) If more than 20 people attend, a 90% supermajority is needed to pass a proposal (e.g. If 20 people are at the meeting, three people are needed to block a decision.) Abstentions are considered support for the proposal in terms of determining the number needed to block the decision from advancing.

6. After the vote, anyone may object to the voting credentials of any participant if it would make a difference in the decision. (The credential test is taken after the vote because, in many cases, credentials would not make a difference in the outcome.) Attendance lists should be accessible via the website and active voting membership established via these records. This is why it is important for participants to review the notes at least enough to see if their attendance was accurately recorded.
7. Meeting notes should accurately record the reasons participants dissented from the decision. Final notes should include any additional written communication provided by dissenters on why they oppose the final decision.
8. If a supermajority cannot be reached, a deadline pressing decision can still be resolved if all dissenting participants sign off in writing on a new proposal developed before the deadline. Dissenters who want to participate in any rewrite attempt should be formally recorded at the meeting and included in the process. Ideally they would be involved in the new attempt to develop a “consensus” proposal before the deadline. Or they can respond to one crafted by others. Not all dissenters have to sign off on a new proposal if they delegate someone else to make the decision for them. This should be recorded in the meeting notes.

Definitions

1. “Consensus” in the stakeholder process means that stakeholders (participants at meetings and those who respond to notes) can accept the decision even if they may not like the decision. Stakeholders should “block” consensus when they believe their fundamental interests, ethics, values, or principles are being violated. Consensus processes allow and encourage participants to express their concerns on all issues but work best when participants are willing to let go of more minor disagreements for the overall good of making advancements in a timely manner.
2. A Voting Member of the council is anyone who attends a second council meeting (Steering, sub-committee, annual meeting) within one-year.