

CAN CONSUMER ADVISORY COUNCIL (CAC) MEETING PROTOCOL

June 10, 2005

I. Types of meetings:

➤ **In person:**

The CAC aims to meet in person three times each year including its annual meeting held concurrently with the Canadian Arthritis Network's (CAN) Annual Scientific Conference and business meeting. The primary goals of the in-person meetings are to develop/review the Council's Strategic Plan each year, and to hold training workshops and to advance the work of the Council.

In person meetings are conducted over at least two full days depending on the nature of the business and the requirements of the Council.

Hosting the meetings in different cities is essential to successful mentoring and is an excellent way to promote the work of consumers in CAN, the network's research program and clinical trials being conducted by CAN researchers. Therefore, CAC in person meetings take place in a different city each time in order to provide skills training to other arthritis consumers across Canada. People will be selected from the broader local arthritis community by the members and the allied members based on their interest in research advocacy and decision-making processes.

➤ **Teleconference:**

The CAC meets by teleconference on a monthly or "as needed" basis. Teleconferences typically last one to one and a half hours. These meetings focus on CAC business.

In addition to these group teleconferences, CAC member "teams" or sub-committees are at liberty to hold separate calls to discuss their common activities/work as needed.

2. Agenda development

One month prior to in person meetings and two weeks prior to teleconference meetings, the CAC chair/co-chairs send an email message to all CAC members for their additions to the list of standing agenda items. They are asked to respond in one week's time.

Standing Agenda Items

- Welcome
- Agenda review and approval
- Group go-round (max. 3 minutes per person)
- Action items from previous meeting
- Strategic Plan activities and next steps report
- CAN Committee Reports:
 - Research Management Committee (meetings, budget, etc.)
 - Training and Education Committee
 - Membership Committee
 - Scientific and Medical Advisory Committee
 - Strategic Vision Committee
 - Other CAN Committees
- Canadian Arthritis Patients Alliance Research Committee Report
- Other business
- Adjournment

After receiving input from the individuals identified above, the CAC chair/co-chairs develop a final agenda, including suggested time allocations for each agenda item. The agenda is reviewed, amended as needed and approved at the start of each in person and teleconference meeting.

3. Decision Making Process

- The quorum at any Council meeting will be two-thirds of members (excluding vacancies);
- The CAC takes all decisions by consensus. (See Appendix I)

4. Minutes

A CAC member volunteers to take minutes for teleconferences and all other meetings. They are circulated to the full CAC membership and allied members. Revisions are to be returned to the chair/co-chairs within one week's time.

The chair/co-chairs prepare the final draft of the minutes document and disseminate it CAC members and allied members and to the following list of stakeholders:

- CAN Management;
- CAN Administration for inclusion in updated website.

Appendix I

Consensus Decision-Making: A Working Guide

contributed by:

Liza Lorenzetti, former CAN Consumer Advisory Council member, Alberta

...with the hopes of assisting others that want to have every voice heard...

What is consensus?

“Consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which an entire group of people can come to an agreement. The input and ideas of all participants are gathered and synthesized to arrive at a final decision acceptable to all.” (Act Up)

What does consensus mean?

“Consensus does not mean that everyone ends up thinking that the decision made is necessarily the best one possible, or even that they are sure it will work. What it does mean is that in coming to that decision, no one felt that her/his position on the matter was misunderstood or that it wasn’t given a proper hearing” (Act up)

Benefits of consensus

It creates community!

Through consensus, a group works together as a team to reach the best solution possible. A consensus process promotes openness, honesty, trust, respect, and a sense of community.

It is actually faster and more efficient!

Consensus is often dismissed as being a time-consuming process, but in actuality it is faster, more efficient, and more reliable than the traditional methods of decision-making. Consensus compels the group to ‘out’ their concerns and disagreements from the onset, instead of harboring them or ‘beating around the bush’. Although a meeting that uses the consensus method may be longer than one where a majority vote is utilized, the non-consensus formats oftentimes do not create group ‘buy in’ on decisions. This kind of commitment by the group is often an essential element of the outcome and follow-through. Also, if there are group members who were voted down or remained silent about their disagreement with the decision, these issues will often pop up later in the process when the decision is being implemented.

Voting versus consensus

- Voting is a win-lose model that does not promote team development;

- Voting can often limit the options on the table, and does not promote the group to think creatively;
- Voting does not compel the group to work through differences to reach a mutually satisfactory decision.

“Groupthink” versus consensus

“Groupthink” (Gellermann, 1981) is when the group appears in agreement on a decision, but some of its members have felt obligated to agree for a variety of reasons, or have kept silent to avoid conflict. When groupthink occurs, not all members have had an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns. Important issues and disagreements have not been properly addressed.

When is consensus most effective?

- When the group has a good understanding of the consensus process;
- When the group has common or complementary values;
- When issues of power differences in the group are acknowledged and addressed;
- When the group members respect and are committed to each other;
- When there is time to complete the process;
- When the group is energized and free to think creatively;
- When the group shares a belief that the consensus process is an effective decision-making tool.

Difficulties in reaching consensus

- When one or more persons utilize their informal or positional power to disempower the decision-making process;
- When trust and respect in the group has not been developed or has been damaged;
- When unresolved issues, personality conflicts, or relationship problems cloud the group dynamic;
- When a win-lose mentality is brought forward in the group;
- When group cohesion, support and solidarity are not priorities;
- When forces outside of the group make an impact on the group’s ability to make decisions;
- When individualism or personal agendas supercede the well-being of the group;
- When the group feels pressured to making ‘snap’ decisions, and time issues are a factor.

Guidelines for reaching consensus

Make sure that everyone who needs to be part of the decision-making process is at the table. If not everyone can attend, ask for their input ahead of time and find out if they are committed to supporting the decisions that are made by the group.

Acknowledge and try to address power differences in the room. Is one of the group members a supervisor or employee of another group member? How does positional power or informal power impact the group?

Allow enough time for everyone to speak, listen and be heard. State your position clearly and honestly. A diversity of opinion is natural and should be valued.

Avoid arguing for a position by using a 'go around' process, where each person is able to speak to the suggestion on the table. Allow each member time to reflect on new suggestions and options.

Moments of silence and reflection give everyone a chance to think about what has been talked about and the different options on the table. Taking a breath between speakers allows you to dream up other ideas, options or alternatives. Don't be afraid of a healthy pause in the conversation!

Steer away from a win-lose paradigm where people will walk away from the table as winners or losers. Having winners and losers in your group takes away from the group dynamic and reduces the positive energy of its members.

If the group seems to be moving in a certain direction, and there are still concerns on the table, ask for creative suggestions to address the stumbling blocks. Ask questions like:

“Can we give this suggestion a try to see if it works and review it next time?”

“Is there anything we can change to make this decision more acceptable to everyone?”

“Should we try this for 6 months, and then try the other idea for 6 months?”

“Do we have time to think this over and come back with creative solutions at the next meeting?”

Be creative with your approach to complex issues and problems. There are often more than two ways of doing things.

Avoid pitfalls such as carrying-through with a decision that one or more members cannot morally or ethically support.

Get to know each other & have fun!