

6 FAH-5 H-150 MAKING DECISIONS

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)
(Office of Origin: RM/ICASS)

6 FAH-5 H-151 GETTING THINGS DONE

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)
(Applies to participating ICASS agencies)

Getting things done is what it is all about. Team building, planning, and running effective meetings are not the ends but the means a council uses to accomplish results. A critical element in the transition between hopes and accomplishments is decision-making. Choices must be made. Will the post improve maintenance services by 10 percent or reduce the wait time for maintenance work orders by two days? Does that mean the post might have to invest more in leasing (by spending more time looking for houses that require less maintenance) or purchase new maintenance equipment instead of replacing two old photocopiers? Post ICASS councils and service providers face choices like these every day. The process of building support and making choices is the essence of decision-making.

6 FAH-5 H-152 CONSENSUS DECISION- MAKING

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)
(Applies to participating ICASS agencies)

Consensus in ICASS is when no member of the council disagrees so strongly to a proposal under consideration that he or she poses an official objection and calls for a vote. Consensus does not mean that each member of a council is in total agreement with every element of the proposal. Rather, it suggests that individual council members, in a spirit of collegiality and cooperation, are willing to move forward with a proposal that, while not ideal in every respect for their individual agency, is acceptable and beneficial for the community as a whole.

6 FAH-5 H-153 REACHING CONSENSUS

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)

(Applies to participating ICASS agencies)

- a. The definition for consensus already communicates the probability that any decision ultimately will be a compromise among competing interests. Consensus cannot be imposed. Where one party has a preponderance of influence, decisions can be dictated but that does not represent consensus. For there to be a consensus, all of the parties must be willing to do their part because they have been persuaded that doing so would be in their best interests. Successful efforts to reach consensus are marked by substantial informal communication, strong negotiating skills among the parties, a willingness to articulate essential interests in clear terms, and creativity in finding ways to accommodate competing positions.
- b. Trust, respect among all parties, a willingness to listen, and an ability to appreciate points of view that do not mirror one's own, make the journey to consensus much smoother. Because consensus is a group effort, posts that already have forged an effective ICASS team will have an easier time than posts where team building remains at a low level. In many respects, team building and consensus decision-making are closely related and mutually reinforce one another. See 6 FAH-5 Exhibit H-153, Reaching Consensus (A Decision-Making Check List).

6 FAH-5 H-154 BREAKING A DEADLOCK

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)

(Applies to participating ICASS agencies)

If a consensus seems unlikely despite extensive discussion and negotiations among participants, the group faces a deadlock. When faced with a deadlock, voting can be used to break the impasse. Each agency that is a party to the post ICASS charter will have one vote. A two-thirds majority of those present and eligible will be sufficient to decide any matter. When voting on a particular service or cost center, only an agency subscribing to that service will be eligible to vote. In such cases, a two-thirds majority of those present and subscribing to the service will be sufficient to decide the matter.

6 FAH-5 H-155 PUT IT IN WRITING

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)

(Applies to participating ICASS agencies)

A final, critical, step in any decision-making process is to document the decision in writing. Ideally, the written record will contain a clear description of most, if not all, the elements in the decision-making checklist [see 6 FAH-5 Exhibit H-153 Reaching Consensus (A Decision-Making Check List)]. It is also useful to put the decision in context and provide enough background so that someone new to post several years later can understand how and why the decision was made. Carefully annotated minutes of meetings is a good way to document decisions. Some posts develop local policy manuals or decision folders. Modern software allows for the development of databases that can be indexed and searched easily. Whatever method a post selects, documenting decisions is critical to preventing future misunderstandings. The documentation should not only be written, but circulated and agreed upon as soon as the decision is made while all post ICASS council members' memories are fresh.

6 FAH-5 H-156 THROUGH H-159 UNASSIGNED

6 FAH-5 EXHIBIT H-153 REACHING CONSENSUS (A DECISION-MAKING CHECK LIST)

(CT:ICASS-5; 07-21-2006)

(Office of Origin: RM/ICASS)

1. Define the problem clearly.
2. Coordinate completely. Informal consultations in advance often can smooth the path to consensus.
3. Check to make sure a proposed decision is not in conflict with other policies and procedures and that it fits in with the broader goals and priorities of the post.
4. Ensure that all customer agencies and service providers have had an opportunity to comment, criticize, or express their nonconurrence.
5. Do an integrity check. Does the proposed decision conform to basic ethical considerations? Does it violate any norms or rules (implicit or explicit)? Will this hurt anyone? What are the short-term gains versus the long-term consequences? If it made the headlines would it stand up to critics?
6. Do a logic check. Does the proposed decision make sense?
7. How will the decision be announced? When? By whom?
8. Is it clear who will be responsible for implementing the decision? Are reporting lines clear? Are expectations clear about the content and frequency of feedback during implementation?
9. Is there a clear mitigation plan for helping those (customer agencies, service recipients, service-provider staff, or others) whose interests might be adversely affected? One post found it could save money by out-sourcing a service; doing so, however, meant that over a dozen local employees were no longer needed; the post then created and implemented a multifaceted plan to place these employees.
10. Is there a back-up plan? Obviously, one doesn't make a decision expecting failure. It helps, however, to realize that success is not guaranteed. Developing a back-up plan to cope with possible problems is an essential part of any decision-making process.