

Decision-Making Resources



a program of the Jane Goodall Institute

Once you have a list of project ideas, how do you decide which one(s) to do? The following activities will help your group narrow down its ideas to one that is acceptable to everyone. Remember that this process could take 10 minutes or a couple of hours, depending upon how everyone reacts to the ideas. Be patient, yet firmly move things along if they get stalled. Also remember that you are the facilitator and can guide them in a direction that will result in deciding on an achievable project. You should only need to do one of the following activities to come to a decision.

Sticker Decisions

This decision-making process is helpful if you have a lot of very different ideas and interests.

1. Gather enough little stickers (circles, stars, etc.) for everyone in the group to have three each. Write each project idea on a separate sheet of paper. (If there are some ideas that are similar, this is a good time to combine them.)
2. Spread the papers with the ideas on them around the room and give everyone three stickers. Tell them to go around and put a sticker by the ideas they like best. They can choose to put three stickers on one idea, one sticker on three different ideas or any variation thereof. As they do this, they need to refrain from commenting on anyone else's sticker placement and to think for themselves, not just agreeing with whatever their best friend is choosing.
3. When participants have put their stickers on, have them gather the papers and sit down. As a group, pick out the ideas that have the most stickers on them. This generally ends up being about five different ideas. Write these ideas down again, and give everyone one sticker. Now they have to vote with one sticker for one of the ideas. There should be a clear "winner" when everyone has placed their sticker. If there isn't, you may have to do a tie-breaker or see if there is a way to easily combine the two ideas.
4. Use that final idea/problem area as the base for selecting an actual project.

Full Group Vote

This method works best with group members who feel comfortable saying what they think in front of one another.

1. Post the list of ideas for all group members to see and tell them that they cannot vote more than three times, and they must vote at least once.
2. Read the list one item at a time and ask the group members to vote for the ideas by raising their hands. Record the number of votes each idea receives. Select the top 3-5 ideas with the most votes and repeat the process with only those 3-5. This time, give each person only one or two votes. There should be a clear "winner" once all the votes have been made. If there is not, have everyone vote again, but only once this time.
3. Use that final idea/problem area as the base for selecting an actual project.

Lobbying for a Project

If you are looking for a way for your group to more fully explore the problem areas it is concerned about, and you have a little extra time, try this selection method.

1. Create a list of ideas/problem areas that your group has identified in their community. (Use the Explore Your Community Worksheets to help identify problem areas in the community.)
2. Post the list of ideas/problem areas for all group members to see. Tell each group member to pick one that s/he would like to consider more fully. If more than one person chooses an idea, make small groups so they can work together.
3. Have them take some time to think about, and possibly research, their chosen idea further. Components of their research could be possible project outcomes, reasons why this problem area is so important to address, etc. Tell them that they will have to present the idea and the new information they find to the rest of the group before a vote is taken. Remind them that an informed voter makes a better decision.
4. Have each group or individual present their idea/problem area to the group taking as much time as you think necessary. It can be an in-depth research project or a short 10-minute group discussion on each idea. Everyone needs to listen carefully so that an informed vote can be taken.
5. Once everyone has presented, make a list of the ideas introduced. Move into a vote (similar to the ones listed above) on only those ideas. This should leave you with one problem area on which to conduct a final project.

Consensus-Based Decision-Making

This decision-making method works best for a group that wants to resolve the objections of the minority to achieve the most agreeable decision.

1. Create a list of all the projects that your group members are considering.

2. Discuss each project on the list as a group with the goal of identifying the opinions of group members on each of the project options.
3. Based on the discussion, a formal decision proposal on the most popular project option is created and presented to the group.
4. The facilitator calls for a consensus on the proposal. Each member of the group states whether they agree with the proposal, often by using a hand gesture.
5. If a consensus is not achieved, each person who disagrees with the proposal presents his or her concerns with the proposal.
6. The proposal is then amended in an attempt to address the concerns of the group members.
7. The process then returns to the call for a consensus and the cycle is repeated until a satisfactory decision is made.

The entire process of selecting a project idea can take an hour, a day or several days depending upon how well your group is working and the number of ideas generated. Allow two one-hour blocks for the first time the group does this process—you can always finish early. You can also select a project topic for the group, depending upon the theme of the year or the content areas covered in class. Conducting the project selection in this way allows for more time to be spent on the actual project development and implementation if time is limited.

Now that you have a project idea, you can move into the preparation stage of project planning.