

Group Voting and Substantial Unanimity – Twelfth Concept

Most ACA groups conduct business meetings with some form of rules of order or general consent. ACA groups are cautioned to avoid too much formality in conducting business meetings. Typically, a chairperson leads the business meeting, recognizes motions, and oversees discussion on the motions. Each person at the business meeting usually shares once on the motion before the chairperson asks if the group is ready to vote on the motion.

Some groups are more informal. They do not make motions or vote formally. Instead, the group discusses a topic or issue until a general consensus is reached by the group. In this form of business meeting, the chairperson of the meeting would listen to the discussion among the group and sense when a consensus is reached. The chairperson would then state that consensus to see if there is agreement with those attending the business meeting. The chairperson might say: “I sense that the group has decided to change the meeting time from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.” If the group agrees then consensus is reached; the decision is made. In determining a consensus, the chairperson states the consensus in an impartial manner and remains open to the will of the business meeting participants.

There is a principle from our Twelve Concepts for ACA World Service known as “substantial unanimity.” The Twelfth Concept states: “that all important decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.” Substantial unanimity applies to the most important business of meetings, Intergroups, and Regions,² in addition to the Annual Business Conference. Substantial unanimity means that decisions reached by ACA meetings or service bodies need to reflect the clear will of the group. Each group and service committee must decide the “important decisions” that require substantial unanimity. Substantial unanimity is always greater than a simple majority and should exceed a two-thirds majority of those voting on the ACA business at hand. If agreement cannot be reached, it is best to postpone action on the motion or topic.

The election of service committee members typically is settled by a simple majority vote, which is acceptable and well below substantial unanimity standard. There are other examples of ACA business being settled by a simple majority. But we are always mindful of the need for substantial unanimity on business of greater importance.

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