



# Starter Kit

for co-designing collaborative network governance  
based on the Consent Principle.

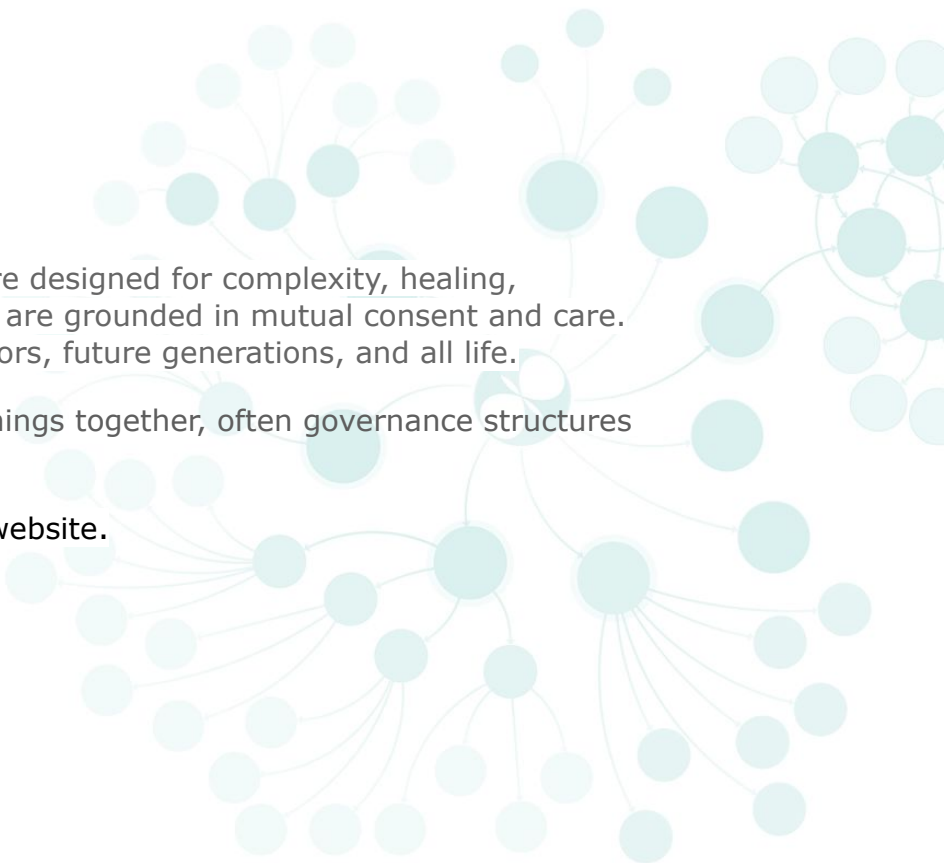


# About us

[Circle Forward](#) envisions governance systems that are designed for complexity, healing, well-being, equity, and regeneration. These systems are grounded in mutual consent and care. They honor our relationship to ourselves, our ancestors, future generations, and all life.

Though it is happening wherever people are doing things together, often governance structures and systems are not visible to everyone.

Read [An Exploration of What Governance Is](#) on our website.



## A curated collection of the tools & resources we turn to most often:

### Resources for Systems Leadership

- *Dawn of Systems Leadership*
- *Systems Change for Sustainable Development*

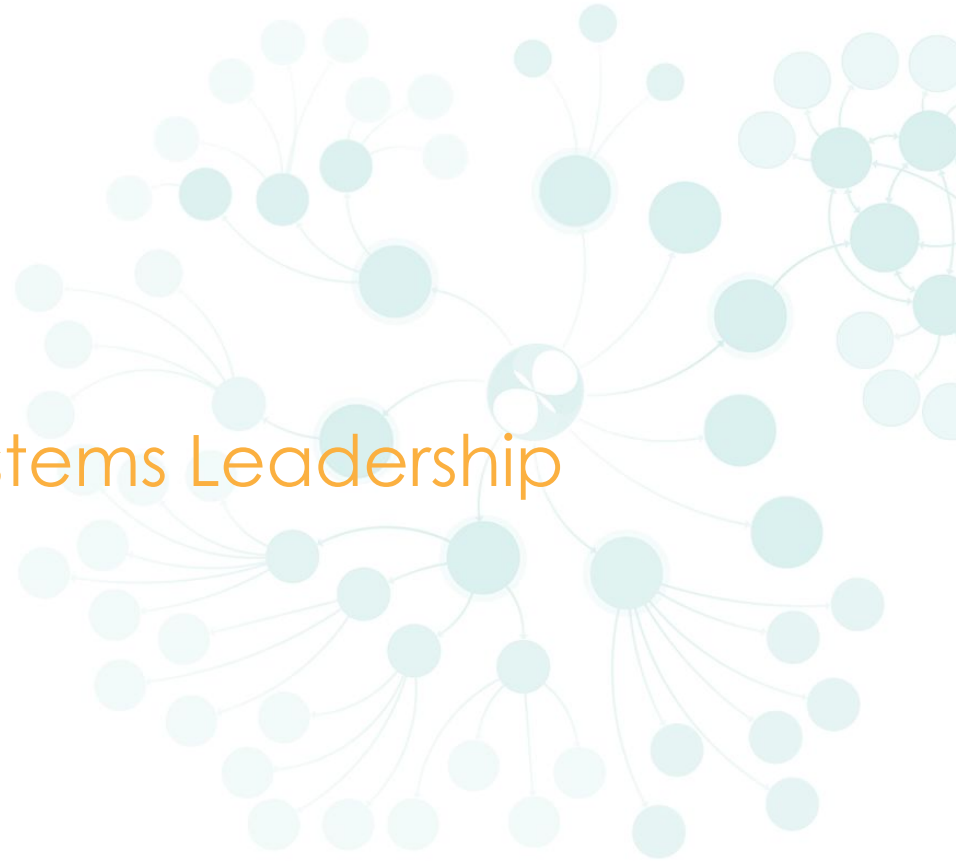
### Resources for Collaborative Governance Co-Design

- *Governance, a powerful leverage point for systems change.*
- *Rate Your Governance System*
- *Network Governance Design Canvas*

### Resources for Cultivating a Culture of Consent

- *The Consent Principle as the Basis for Governance Decisions*
- *What is the Consent Principle?*
- *Range of Tolerance*
- *Objections are Treasure*
- *Rounds: A Simple Technique for More Engaging Meetings*
- *The Consent Protocol*
- *When do we use Consent for decision making?*
- *Consent in Practice*

# Resources for Systems Leadership





## Dawn of Systems Leadership:

This classic article enumerates key skills and tools that can be harnessed to bring about revolutionary change including these **core** capabilities to develop in order to foster collective leadership.

- The ability to see the larger system.
  - Helps people see the larger system in order to build shared understanding of complex problems.
- The ability to foster reflection and more generative conversations.
  - Deep, shared reflection that enables group to actually “hear” a point of view different from their own, and to appreciate emotionally as well as cognitively each other’s reality.
- The ability to shift the collective focus from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future.
  - Helps the group build inspiring visions *and* face difficult truths about the present reality, learning how to use the tension between vision and reality to inspire truly new approaches.

By Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, & John Kania  
Published in Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2015

[Download this article here.](#)

# Systems Leadership for Sustainable Development:

## *Strategies for Achieving Systemic Change*

"The complex and interconnected issues at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require innovative approaches for mobilizing widespread and meaningful action. One of these approaches is described as **Systems Leadership**."

Systems Leadership is a set of skills and capacities that any individual or organization can use to catalyze, enable and support the process of systems-level change."

This paper offers clear concepts, examples and tools of Systems Leadership, including

- The key elements of Systems Leadership
- The Journey of Systems Leadership
- The CLEAR Framework for Leading Systems Change

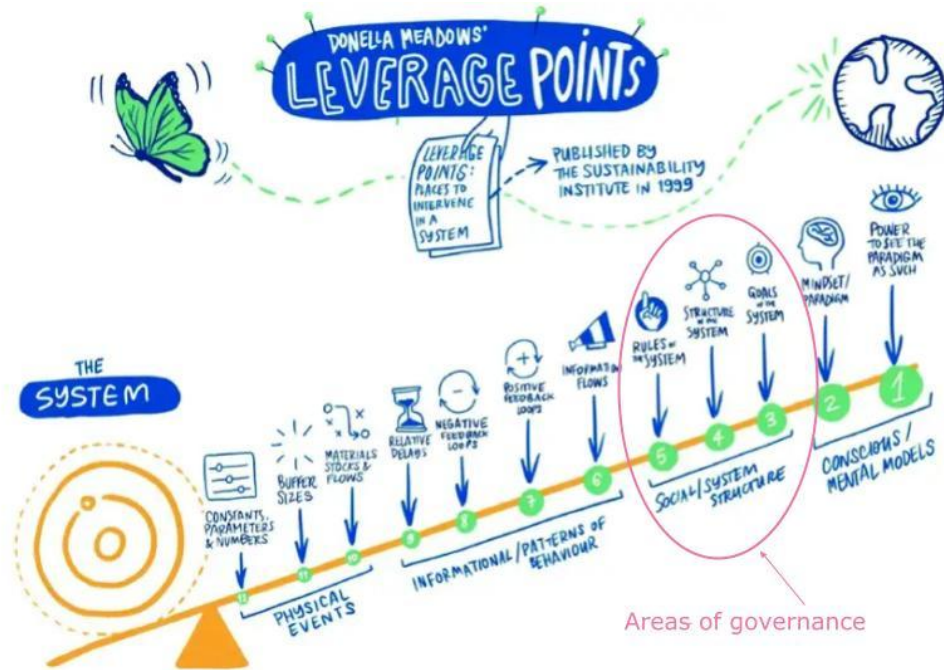


[Download this paper here.](#)

# Resources for Collaborative Governance Co-Design



Governance gives form to power. We embed our values into our operations through governance, and it is a key leverage point for transforming systems.



Governance  
is a key leverage  
point for systems  
change.



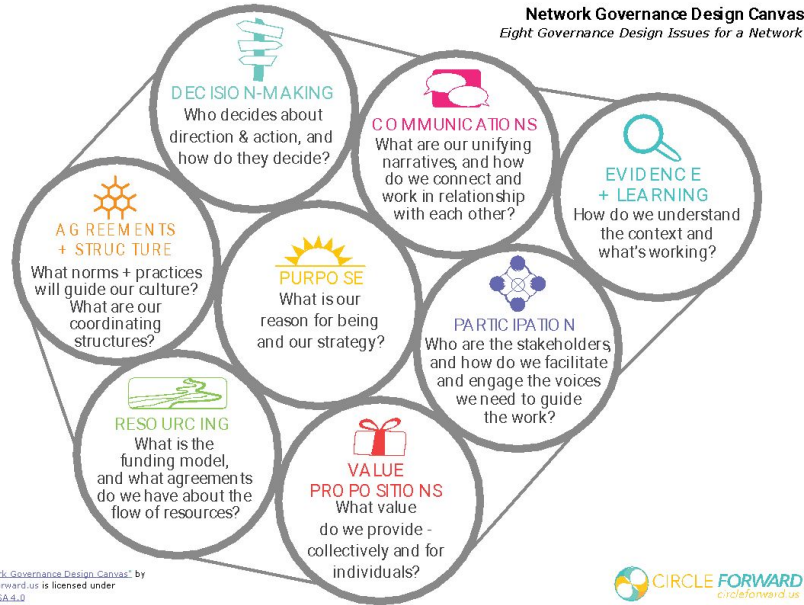
## Resource - Rate Your Current Governance System



Start a conversation about how well your system of governance is working.

[This toolkit](#) includes some qualities of good governance and provides an informal assessment your group can do together.

# Network Governance Design Canvas



Leaders can use our [Network Governance Design Canvas](#) to explore the eight areas of governance design in a network or organization.

READ: [Thriving and Equitable Systems are Governed by Good Network Design](#), to learn more about each of these design issues.

[Download this tool here.](#)

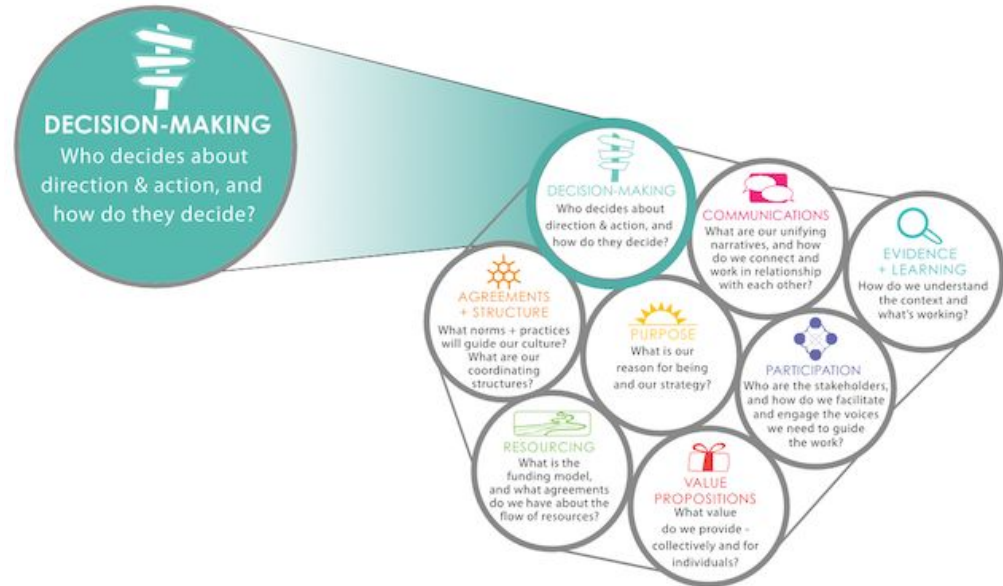
# Resources for Cultivating a Culture of Consent



# The Consent Principle as the Basis for Governance Decisions

Decision-Making is the “gateway” to governance co-design because every other area emerges as designers make, implement and learn from decisions.

Governance designers first decide who will make decisions and how they will decide.



# The Consent Principle

A [legal definition](#) of consent is, “When a person voluntarily and willfully agrees to undertake an action that another person suggests.”

All true collaboration meets this condition of consent among the participants.

In governance [The Consent Principle](#) is a **commitment** to engagement and trust among participants who are impacted by decisions, to listen to each other and adapt when not in consent, while staying on track to make timely decisions.

Creating options to resolve objections allows networks and groups to leverage all the benefits of their diversity, avoid potential pitfalls, and **strengthen relationships** — all while sustaining forward momentum.

In collaborative network governance, **where trust is the currency, the Consent Principle is foundational.**

[Learn more about The Consent Principle here.](#)

**Consent decision-making is a culture-transforming PRACTICE. Not always easy, usually different than we're used to, and sometimes humbling.**

**Don't give up.**  
**Our governance systems must work for everyone.**

Consent-based decision-making takes the most time at the beginning of initiatives, when trust is low or damaged, relationships are new, viewpoints are very diverse, or decisions carry high impact or risk.

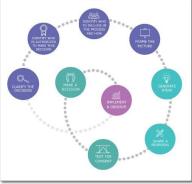
We've seen, as the commitment to the Consent Principle persists and trust deepens, people give each other more autonomy to make decisions - knowing that they will be heard, and decisions adapted, if they are out of consent.

**The CONSENT PRINCIPLE...**

**In Governance** is a commitment to engagement and trust among decision-makers and those who are impacted by decisions, to listen to each other and adapt when not in consent, while staying on track to make timely decisions.

**In Practice** means that a decision has been made when no one impacted by the decision has any significant objections to it.

**In Law** is when a person voluntarily and willfully agrees to undertake an action that another person suggests. (Cornell University Law School).



**The DECISION-MAKING PROTOCOL**

We developed the Decision-Making Protocol with network partners of The Alliance in Alaska. You can find a free Creative Commons version of the Protocol on [our website](#). This protocol gives leaders authority to make decisions when they take responsibility for addressing their blindspots with the people most impacted.

**Applying the Principle of Consent invites the spirit of true collaboration.**  
For resources, tools and coaching visit [circleforward.us](#)

[Download this handout here.](#)

# Range of Tolerance and Objections in Consent Decision-making

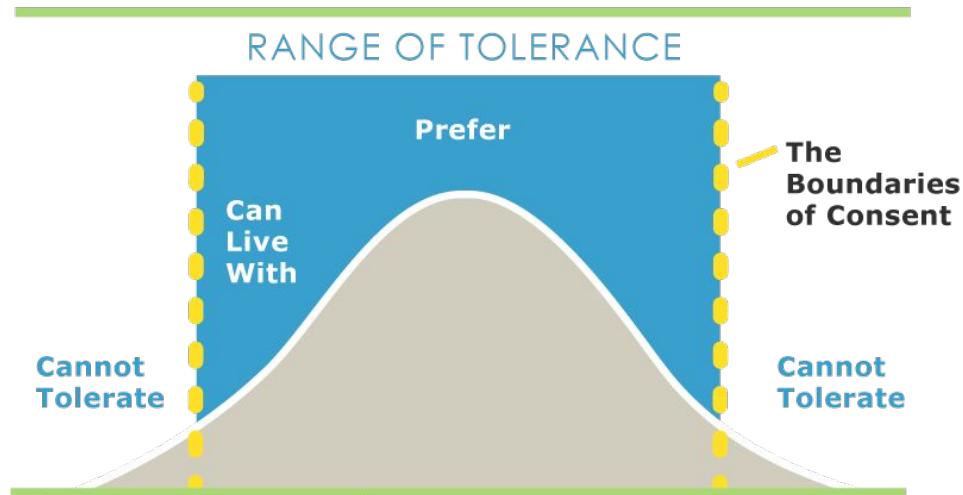
The range of tolerance framework comes from ecosystems theory - a basic worldview that we are **deeply interconnected**.

When diverse members of an ecosystem are able to live within their range of tolerance, the whole ecosystem becomes more resilient and adaptive.

That sense of operating like an ecosystem is a valuable metaphor in collaborative networks and systems change.

A culture of consent means the group has a commitment to include and adapt when a member is out of their range of tolerance.

A range of tolerance is the boundary of consent that someone can or cannot live with when it comes to a decision or conditions that affect them.



[Download this handout here.](#)

When a member is outside their range of tolerance, we say there is an **objection**.

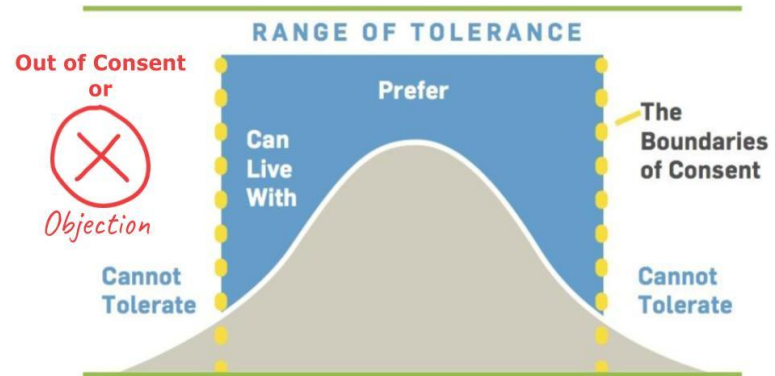
By objection, we mean no one can identify a risk that the group cannot afford to take.

Those risks typically involve conflicts with the stated purpose or strategies. Or there is a condition that would make it very difficult for a member to perform their role.

Under those conditions, the group or person would be out of their [range of tolerance](#).

A culture of consent means the group has a commitment to include and adapt when a member is out of their range of tolerance.

## Boundaries of Consent



[Download this handout here.](#)

An **objection** is valued in culture of consent because it reveals gaps in awareness and understanding that might lead to unintended consequences.

An **objection** is supported by reasons that can be understood by other members.

The group shares an intent to listen to **understand the risk** a participant is sensing, so as to adapt and find solutions that address the objection, to get the benefit of our diversity, and to bring the group back within its range of tolerance -- all while sustaining forward momentum.

The intent is to understand those reasons and to find solutions that address the objection and bring the group back within its [range of tolerance](#).



Objections are  
**TREASURE**  
because they  
reveal  
**Gaps in  
Awareness**



[Objections are Treasure](#) provides guidance for facilitating, reflecting on and responding to objections in a Culture of Consent.

[Download this handout here.](#)



# Rounds:

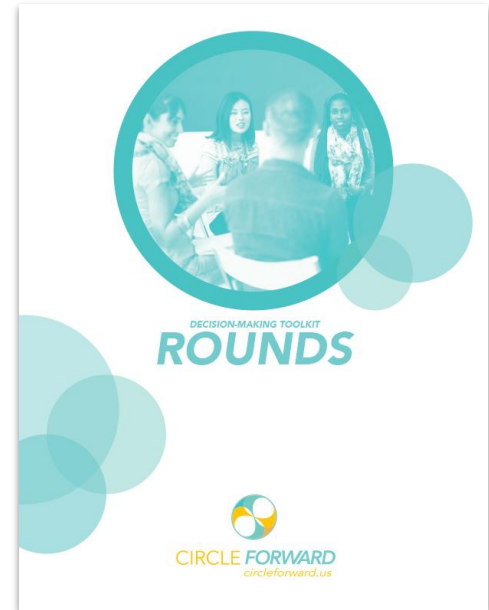
## A Simple Technique for More Inclusive, Engaging Meetings

We have heard from many people how this simple technique can instantly shift a meeting to become more energizing, engaging and inclusive. And you don't necessarily need to be leading the meeting to try this! You may be surprised by how well it works!

This mini toolkit provides:

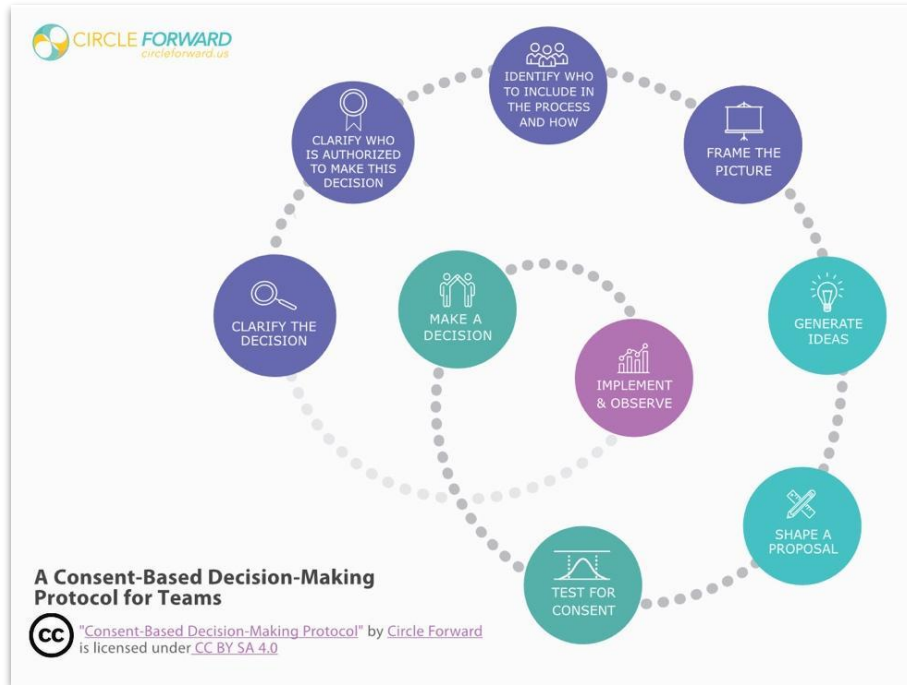
- Why rounds work and where they work best.
- The Benefits of using Rounds.
- Four different types of rounds and their purposes.

Experience has shown us that rounds are among the most efficient ways for the group to come to understand the way forward together.



[Download this handout here.](#)

# The Consent Protocol



People who were not bought in on a decision can withhold their support and actively or passively resist it. Future opportunities can be lost when trust or relationships are sacrificed.

At the same time, getting everyone “to the table,” is usually impractical.

So, a single decision-maker or small team finds other ways to include voices and shape proposals for action, by testing for consent throughout the process.

We co-designed the [Consent Protocol](#) as a guide.

*Our [Consent Protocol](#) is designed with the wisdom of legions of community organizers, who take time up front to build relationships and trust.*

[Download this handout here.](#)

# When do we use consent for decision making?

Do I need to get consent on every decision?

Can we just authorize someone to make this decision?

How do we test for consent and objections when

1. It's not always easy or possible to get everyone at the meeting.
2. In collaboratives, people often are coming in and out, some joining early, some coming in later.

We heard you.

This one page handout provides some answers to these frequently asked questions.

**WHEN do we use Consent for Decision-Making?**

**Short answer: Always**  
In a consent culture we have an agreement: I won't "go along to get along" when I'm outside my range of tolerance. And, our whole team owns the objections. We adapt when someone is outside their range of tolerance.

**In consent culture, does every decision have to wait until we get everybody together?**

**Short answer: No**  
Testing for consent invites inclusion (and objections) in any of these ways and more.

**In team meetings**  


**In facilitated community meetings (live or virtual)**  


**one-to-one conversations**  


**In reviews of available data in similar situations and past experiences**  


**with surveys, or platforms like Slack or Loomio**  


All of these carry the commitment to engage and respond to what is meaningful to those who are impacted by decisions.

**Can't we just authorize a person or team to make decisions?**

**Short answer: Yes**

 By consent, we can authorize a person or team to make decisions within the scope of their role and aims. This means they do not need to test for consent on each decision.

 In cases where a person or a team have been authorized, consent leaders still get curious and inquire whether trust will be affected if people or groups are not given opportunities to weigh in. If so, leaders may communicate more often. However, testing for consent is not about seeking approval. Rather, people with authority test for consent to uncover their gaps in awareness, so decisions are wiser.

 \*When do we use Consent for decision making\* handout by Circle Forward is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

[Download this handout here.](#)

# Consent in Practice

A set of simple guidelines for easy reference and inclusion in your group's governance orientation handbook.



[Download this resource here.](#)