

THOUGHTFUL DECISION MAKING

We make decisions every day. Certainly you make personal decisions, whether it's what to have for lunch or where to invest your money. Some decisions are easy and some more difficult, but when you are trying to make decisions as a group the process becomes more complicated.

When you serve on a board or committee, paying a bit of attention to the decision making process can relieve some of the struggle. Some things to consider include:

- Identify exactly what decision has to be made. Where does the issue have its roots? Who is involved?
- What is it that needs to happen? Clarify and write down the goal.
- Think practically. Write down as many ideas as you can think of that would help. Some call this brainstorming. During the brainstorming process you don't want to be critical of ideas – the point is to get as many options on the table as possible.
- Evaluate the ideas you have generated. Pick out the practical ones that relate to the goal of the group and discard others.
- Gather the facts—not rumor, innuendo, or commonly held beliefs. Then put those facts on paper to help the group clarify their situation.
- Determine what you **don't** know about the issue. What other information do you need to acquire and how are you going to get it?
- Who is going to be affected by the decision? Will the decision affect everyone associated with your group or just a few?
- What is the value to be derived from making the decision? Will the decision support the basic principles the group promotes?
- Decision-making always involves risks and benefits. For your potential solutions, write down the risks to those who will be affected by the decision. Then consider the benefits. How do the risks and benefits weigh out for each option?
- Some decisions would be easy to make if the result clearly provided more benefits than risks. However, all too often we cannot make desired decisions because the risks are too great. Ask if the solution will result in positive action toward attaining the goals.
- Ask why this decision is good—what are the motives for doing this?
- On a scale of one to ten, how important is this decision toward attaining the goal?

The most important decision making tool is to use reason rather than emotion. Before your organization makes it's next difficult decision, consider the important questions given here.