BUILDING CONSENSUS

Interpretations, Policies and Guidelines

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This document offers promising practices on **how to work in a pay equity committee** for the successful implementation of the Pay Equity Act.

The role of pay equity committee members is to work **collaboratively** and through **consensus** to develop a pay equity plan for their workplace.

Promising practices for building consensus

Consensus is defined as **"**a general agreement: unanimity; the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned; group solidarity in sentiment and belief."[i]

Consensus building is an approach to decision making that follows these principles:

- Decisions are reached through mutual consent, with each participant given an opportunity to voice their preference;
- All committee members should be prepared to co-operate and participate in the process;
- The decision making process is constructed based on principles of fairness, openness and trust;[ii] and,
- Outcomes yield benefits to all participants.[iii]

Reaching consensus is an important part of how pay equity committee members make decisions. Pay equity committee members will have to work collaboratively and be prepared to compromise in order to reach consensus. Putting matters to a vote by the committee should only be used as a last resort if all efforts to reach consensus have failed.
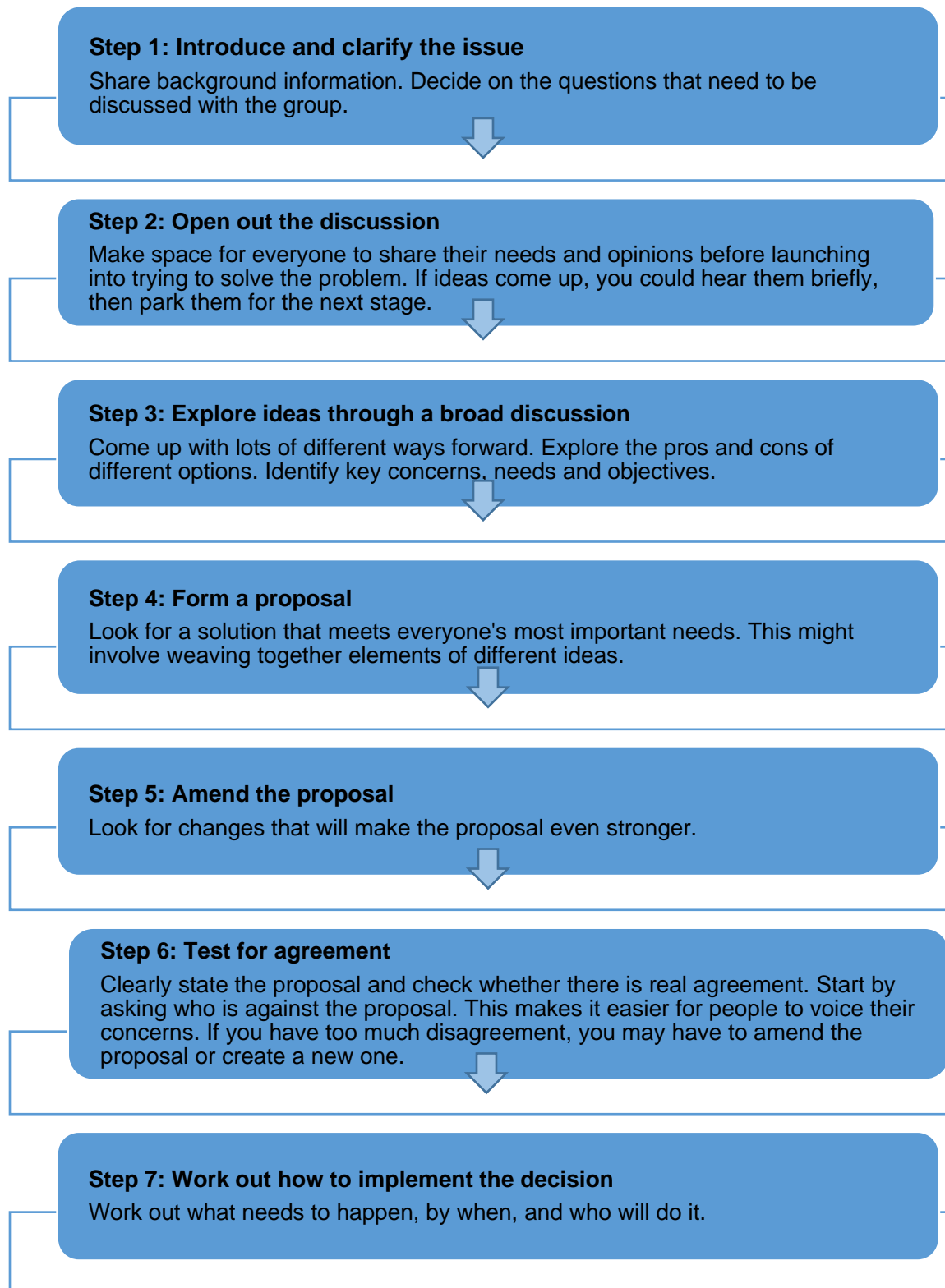
Coming to decisions through consensus has several **advantages**:

- It saves time and avoids disputes;
- It allows for different viewpoints to be heard;
- It leads to an in-depth consideration of the different facets of an issue; and,
- The decisions are more likely to be supported by all.[iv]

Some **promising practices** for participating in consensus based decision-making:[v]

- ✓ **Be willing to work towards a solution that is best for everyone**. Be flexible and willing to give up your position or favorite idea if there is another solution that meets your core needs.
- ✓ **Help to create a respectful and trusting atmosphere**. Make space for everyone to express their ideas and opinions, remembering that members will have different needs, values and ways of communicating.
- ✓ **Be open and honest about the reasons for your viewpoints.** Express your concerns early on in the process so that they can be taken into account in any proposal.
- ✓ **Listen actively to what people are trying to say**. Make an effort to understand someone's position and their underlying interests and concerns.
- ✓ **Do not be afraid of disagreement and conflict**. Differences of opinion are natural and need to be shared so that the committee can come to a sound decision. Easily reached consensus may cover up the fact that some people do not feel safe or confident enough to express their opinion.

The consensus building **process** can look like this:[vi]

Step 1: Introduce and clarify the issue
Share background information. Decide on the questions that need to be discussed with the group.

Step 2: Open out the discussion
Make space for everyone to share their needs and opinions before launching into trying to solve the problem. If ideas come up, you could hear them briefly, then park them for the next stage.

Step 3: Explore ideas through a broad discussion
Come up with lots of different ways forward. Explore the pros and cons of different options. Identify key concerns, needs and objectives.

Step 4: Form a proposal
Look for a solution that meets everyone's most important needs. This might involve weaving together elements of different ideas.

Step 5: Amend the proposal
Look for changes that will make the proposal even stronger.

Step 6: Test for agreement
Clearly state the proposal and check whether there is real agreement. Start by asking who is against the proposal. This makes it easier for people to voice their concerns. If you have too much disagreement, you may have to amend the proposal or create a new one.

Step 7: Work out how to implement the decision
Work out what needs to happen, by when, and who will do it.

Promising practices to **help facilitate** the consensus building process within your pay equity committee include:

- Reiterating that the **common goal** of the pay equity committee is to develop or update a pay equity plan in the workplace. You can link this goal to the purpose of the Pay Equity Act: to redress gender-based discrimination in the pay practices and systems of employers.
- **Sticking together** throughout the pay equity exercise, even when there is disagreement. This also means that members must be prepared to work together as equals and learn to recognize and value differences.
- Working in an atmosphere of **trust and openness**. Consensus means being honest with the group. Finding a solution that meets the needs of everyone relies on people being flexible about their preferences.
- Providing **sufficient time and training** for members to learn how to work by consensus and for making decisions.
- Ensuring there is a **clear process**[vii] in place for making decisions and make sure everyone has a shared understanding of how it works. This includes assigning roles and responsibilities[viii] for each meeting.
- Promoting **active participation** in all committee meetings and activities. Hearing what other members have to say is a key component of coming to a solution that meets everyone's needs.
- Ensuring that all members have the **information** necessary to formulate educated opinions and decisions.

Resources

For **more information on the Pay Equity Act**, visit the Canadian Human Rights Commission's website at: https://www.payequitychrc.ca/en.

For more in-depth **information on promising practices** for working in a joint pay equity committee, please explore the following resources.

Beyond Intractability. "Knowledge Base: Consensus Building". Retrieved from: https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/consensus_building

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Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (2013). "The Effective JHSC". Retrieved from:
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[ii] Connelly, Stephen and Tim Richardson (2004). "Exclusion: The necessary difference between ideal and practical consensus." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management,* Vol.47, No. 1, p. 4. Retrieved from: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/208493851.pdf

[iii] Sidaway, R. (1998) Consensus Building. Good Practice in Rural Development No. 5 (Edinburgh: Scottish National Rural Partnership).

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[v] Seeds For Change. "Consensus Decision Making: A Short Guide." Retrieved from: https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortconsensus

[vi] Seeds For Change. "Consensus Decision Making: A Short Guide." Retrieved from: https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortconsensus

[vii] Chicha, M.-T. (2008). *Promoting equity: Gender-neutral job evaluation for equal pay: A step-by-step guide.* International Labour Organization 2008. p. 13 .Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_122372.pdf

[viii] Harvard Law School, Program on Negotiation. "What is Consensus Building?" Retrieved from: https://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/consensus-building/