

Gradients of Agreement

When team members are asked if they support a decision, it's unclear what their "yes" or "no" means. Does a "yes" mean enthusiastic support or just a desire for the meeting to end? Does a "no" mean they can't live with the decision or that minor adjustments would make them more supportive?

A decision continuum, such as the Gradients of Agreement, enables individuals to express their responses to a proposal before and after discussions. It also enables the leader to assess if there is sufficient support, rather than unanimous support, to proceed.

CONTINUUM OF GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT

1	2	3	4	5
Start over	I back this idea with significant changes	I oppose this idea but will not vote against it	I back this idea with minor changes	I wholeheartedly support this proposal.

TIPS FOR USING THE GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT DURING A MEETING

Introduce the decision method before the discussion

Before beginning the discussion, inform the team of their role in the decision-making process. Let them know that after enough discussion, a proposal will be formulated, and each individual will use the gradients of agreement to indicate their level of support for the proposal. Display the continuum and review the four levels of support.

Develop a proposal after sufficient discussion

Once the team has concluded the discussion, the chair, agenda item leader, or team member may request or suggest a concise proposal (one - two sentences) outlining the team's planned response regarding the discussed issue. The proposal can be adjusted accordingly based on the team's collective thoughts.

ASK EACH PERSON TO INDICATE HIS/HER LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE PROPOSAL

During the meeting, the person leading the discussion should repeat the proposal and allow each person to express their agreement or disagreement. It may be helpful for the leader to mark each person's level of support to visually represent the overall response and determine if there is enough support for the proposal to proceed.

If someone has indicated a "1" or "2" on the continuum, ask them what changes could be made to help increase their level of agreement by one. These changes are often simple to implement.

DETERMINE IF THERE IS SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO MOVE FORWARD

It is rare to have unanimous support, where everyone indicates "4" and the gradients of agreement allow for a range of support to exist and still move forward on a proposal.

The leader has the authority to make decisions:

- There is sufficient agreement to make a formal decision, based on the majority of responses rated as "3" and "4" to the proposal.
- There is a lack of consensus on the decision, and the team should continue to discuss the issue.

TIME-SAVING TIP

To gauge agreement among team members, consider conducting a straw poll using the Gradients of Agreement. This allows individuals around the table the opportunity indicate their level of agreement on a continuum. If a majority of participants indicate a level of 3, 4, or 5, the group can typically proceed without needing a lengthy discussion on the topic.

Adapted from the *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making* by Kaner, Sam, and Lenny Lind. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons/Jossey-Bass, 2007. Print.