



Coloured Cards Decision-Making

The coloured cards consensus decision-making method used at Earthsong allowed a group of ordinary people to create a major innovative housing development. Who says consensus doesn't work!

Every member has a set of six coloured cards which are used in meetings in two different ways.

DISCUSSION MODE

Each person wishing to speak raises the appropriate card at any time during the discussion. The facilitator calls on people to speak according to the following priority:

Black	I have an interpersonal difficulty that is preventing my full participation
Red	I have a process observation
Orange	I wish to acknowledge someone or something
Yellow	I have a question, or need clarification
Green	I can provide clarification to that question
Blue	I have a comment or opinion

Black cards have first priority, and the holder is asked to state their difficulty and how they would like the matter dealt with. The group then decides whether this should be processed within the meeting or between the individuals concerned.

The red card has the next priority, and is used to point out a process issue such as a breach of procedure, discussion going off-topic or over-time, or to make a group observation. Next, people holding up orange cards are called upon to deliver their acknowledgment/s.

After a question has been asked using a yellow card, people raise green cards to provide clarification. Only after all questions have been answered does the facilitator call on those holding blue cards to state their comments and opinions. In this way dominant personalities find it harder to push their ideas through at the expense of less vocal members, and softer-spoken members find it easier to voice their concerns.

DECISION-MAKING MODE

When the group is ready to make a decision following a period of discussion, each person chooses a card to indicate their level of support for the proposal as follows:

Green	I agree with the proposal at hand
Blue	I am neutral or basically for it, with some slight reservation
Yellow	I have a question to be answered before I can make a decision
Orange	I have a serious reservation, but I am not willing to block consensus
Red	I believe this proposal is not in the best interests of the project and I will block consensus

If orange or red cards are raised, those people get to voice their concerns if they have not already done so. At this point the current proposal may be amended to address concerns. A second show of cards then follows. On the second carding a proposal is passed unless red cards are still being raised.

If consensus is not reached, the proposal is sent back to the appropriate focus group for more work. If consensus is still not reached at a subsequent meeting, and it is both important and urgent that a decision is made, the decision can be made by a 75% majority vote of people eligible to take part in the decision making.

This process requires every member in the room to participate in decision making. The cards allow shades of support for the proposal to be expressed, and individuals get the chance to voice their reservations while still accepting the decision as the will of the group as a whole.

