



NJ Cohousing Development Cooperative

How We Use Sociocracy



Why do we propose to use Sociocracy?

Sociocracy, also called **Dynamic Governance**, is a type of organization and collaborative governance designed for fairness, transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability. Using sociocracy's methods enables the cooperative to meet the needs of the whole group while continually adapting to changing circumstances.

Using Sociocracy Instead of Consensus: Our movement used consensus until we learned over the years that consensus has significant drawbacks unless a group is and remains very small. Thus, many groups within the ecovillage- cohousing-cooperative movement have more recently gravitated toward sociocracy which is more efficient and adaptable.

Reaching Consent—is crucial to sociocracy: When we're each ok with something and it doesn't interfere with what we're trying to accomplish, we've reached consent and can move forward. Unlike consensus, which implies widespread agreement, consent is permission to test something to see how well it works.

Consent is not agreement or the same as "consensus," it's the acceptance of a proposal as good enough to try for now, having resolved all objections.

Objections—are explanations of how carrying out a proposal would interfere with the Cooperative's mission and/or operations, distinguished from concerns. So as to make group decisions that accurately reflect diverse perspectives and promote buy-in, objections are invited into the decision-making process.

Rounds--change the dynamics of conversations and the energy of the group from convincing

others, to opening space for solutions to emerge. Because using rounds offers full transparency in decision-making, they tend to build trust. Designed to result in fair decisions by hearing everyone's voice, rounds provide an opportunity to listen and understand more than talk. Everyone has a turn, without cross talk or debate.

- (a) **opening**—we start the meeting with space for each person to transition from previous activities into the meeting. It can be a chance to share whatever might be affecting you.
- (a) **understand**—ask clarifying questions only (no opinions)
- (b) **explore**—quick responses to get a feel of where the group is. Can do multiple exploratory rounds as needed.
- (c) **consent or object**—brief either "I consent/have no objection" or "I have an objection ___[one phrase explanation]___"/ "I am not ready to consent and have concerns, so I want to explore more"
- (d) **process**—when it's not clear how to move forward
- (e) **closing**—we end each meeting with a moment for each person to evaluate the leaders, teamwork and/or activity; it's a chance to express appreciation.

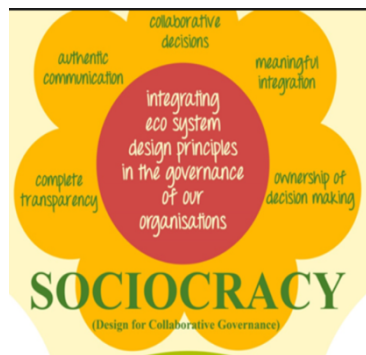


Members can, of course, chose to pass during a round, but it's often useful to affirm that you agree with what someone else has stated so that the full range of views is clear.

Using proposals

Coming to meetings prepared with proposals helps operate efficiently, so individuals or groups should put together a clear, short format recommendation.

Policy Decision-making: All members are asked to consent to those of NJ CDC's decisions that affect them. A proposal is made and goes through rounds until consent is reached as follows: (1) To ensure full understanding, a round of questions is undertaken. (2) Next a round for member reactions provides feedback. Multiple exploratory/reaction rounds may be warranted. (3) The input is incorporated into the proposal as appropriate. (4) A further consent round determines whether the proposal is accepted. (5) If necessary, objections are addressed and integrated into the proposal which is then presented again.



Feedback: We include measurable results in a proposal to enhance accountability in addition to soliciting input from other helping circles as needed. Decisions include a time period for reevaluation, so ongoing experimentation refines and improves our work. This is crucial to make consent workable, because all policies are temporary.

Governance: Circles carry out the work of the Cooperative: each circle selects a Leader to ensure the implementation of the plans and a Delegate, both of whom serve on the upper circle (Coordinating Circle). Similarly, circles can have sub-circles with their own Leader and Delegate. Additionally, each meeting has a Facilitator and Note-taker who participate in setting the agenda. Sociocracy is non-hierarchical: circles choose how best to approach their own work and each member has an equivalent voice.

Other Terminology:

To get started, check these out:

- a **six minute** video on [decision-making](#).
- general information on [rounds](#)
- [video](#) summary less than **4 minutes**
- videos ranging from **4 -25 minutes** [Sociocracy 3.0 Tutorials](#) with practical lessons.

More information will be posted to our website: cdc.ecovillagenj.org

Aims—Defines specifically what the circle will produce (to support the mission of CDC)

Circle—self governing, semi-autonomous working group

Concerns— are criticisms that can be expressed during

exploratory rounds. They do not preclude moving forward with a decision. They can be addressed during evaluations, particularly if they are quantifiable

Distributed Authority—collaborative leadership promotes accountability as well as collective intelligence

Double-linked—method circles use to ensure communication flow both to and from the larger/smaller group

Dynamic Governance—synonym for Sociocracy, but sometimes uses distinct terms

Facilitator—ensures meetings: stay on track, use rounds following accepted procedures, and are evaluated

Hand motions—thumbs up for consent, wavering hand down for concerns, open palm up for objections: can be used instead of a verbal round for a quick decision. The CDC also uses COLOR CODED cards which are a non-sociocratic method to improve efficiency.

Leader/Execution Coordinator—responsible for ensuring the implementation of the work of the group

Paramount Objections- Perhaps a clearer term to describe objections: any objection will stop a proposal from being implemented

Range of tolerance—From enthusiasm to not objecting; a decision or action that works for each of us (even if we don't agree)

Self-organization—

Operations and decision-making are decentralized, distributed over all the components of the system

