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Fist to Five Voting and Consensus

Fist to Five is quality voting. It has the elements of consensus built in and can prepare groups to transition into consensus if they wish. Most people are accustomed to the simplicity of “yes” and “no” voting rather than the complex and more community-oriented consensus method of decision making. Fist to Five introduces the element of the quality of the “yes.” A fist is a “no” and any number of fingers is a “yes,” with an indication of how good a “yes” it is. This moves a group away from quantity voting to quality voting, which is considerably more informative. Fist to Five can also be used during consensus decision making as a way to check the “sense of the group,” or to check the quality of the consensus.



Fist to Five is accomplished by raising hands as in voting, with the number of fingers raised that indicates level of agreement.

- **A fist** means, “I vote NO.” or in consensus it means , “I object and will block consensus (usually on moral grounds).”
- **1 finger** means, “I’ll just barely go along.” or, “I don’t like this but it’s not quite a no.” or, “I think there is lots more work to do on this proposal.” In consensus this indicates standing aside, or not being in agreement but not blocking the consensus.
- **2 fingers** means “I don’t much like this but I’ll go along.”

- **3 fingers** means, “I’m in the middle somewhere. Like some of it, but not all.”
- **4 fingers** means, “This is fine.”
- **5 fingers** means, “I like this a lot, I think it’s the best possible decision.”

Fist to Five Process:

1. When a proposal has been brought before a group, it has been well discussed and refined as needed, a vote for passage is taken.
2. People raise their hands with the number of fingers that indicate their degree of agreement with the proposal. Hands are held VERY high and the room is scanned by all. That way everyone is checking the sense of the room and not individual opinions.
3. The vote can stand as taken, with all fists and fingers counted, the majority winning. Or, people with fists and one finger can be asked to speak to their objections and offer possible solutions to overcome their objections. This is attempted, and then a second and final vote is taken, which is the final vote.
4. It is often wise to check early in the proposal dialogue, as sometimes a group is actually ready for consensus or a vote earlier than expected and a lot of time can be saved. An early check might find all 4 and 5 fingers except for two 1's, meaning the proposal would be voted in, or in the case of consensus, no one would block consensus and only two people have needs to be met. Only those people then speak and their objections addressed which saves a lot of time.
5. A low quality vote (lots of 1s, 2s and 3s) tells you the decision is probably a stop gap measure and will need to be watched closely or revisited soon. It is generally wise to attach a date for review to a decision that is low in quality. Some groups find it saves time in the end to not accept a vote that is affirmative but primarily 1s and 2s as the proposal is generally troublesome and comes up again anyway.
6. If it is obvious that the vote is wildly split, with no real majority, despite a winning “yes,” the group knows it has more work to do, and that the decision may not endure. They can expect more controversy and know a plan must be made to address the polarized views.
7. When Fist to Five has been used for a while, a transition to consensus, if desired, is quite easy.