Kavana Tree Bressen ✶ Facilitation & Workshops

ww.effectivecolwlective.net • kavana@effectivecollective.net • (541) 343-3855 • Chanchifin, Oregon

Decision Boards (and Committee Decisions)

by Kavana Tree Bressen

Not every decision needs the attention of your whole group. Some can be made by one person in charge of an area. Some can be made by a committee. And some could be made, if they aren't yet, via a "Decision Board."

Here's an example of how it might work. Let's say you have a parking team that wants to make some changes to how and where guests park when visiting the community. The team posts their proposed changes on a central bulletin board, for a prescribed period of time, say, two weeks. During that period, people wander by and check off their names in one of three columns:

- I'm ok with this.
- I have minor questions or concerns, which i will communicate with your team directly about.
- I think this should go to a community meeting.

At the end of the period, the team reviews the responses, and if no major concerns have been received and the proposal hasn't attracted sufficient controversy to require a whole group meeting, then the proposal becomes official operating procedure.

Options to consider when setting up a Decision Board include:

1. How long is the review period?
2. Do proposals go out via email in addition to a central physical posting?
3. How many requests does it take to move something to community meeting?
4. How can decisions made via Decision Board be revisited?
5. What about the people who have not checked off their name in any column? Is it their responsibility to give input, or someone else's responsibility to gain their approval?

Here is a longer description of the system in operation at Songaia Cohousing, by Fred Lanphear:

> Individuals or committees prepare a proposal that includes a description of what is being proposed and how it is to be funded (if funds are needed). If funding is needed, there is a place on the response sheet for folks to indicate how much they are willing to pledge towards the proposal. The proposal with accompanying response sheet is sent out over email and then posted for two weeks during which time individuals can initial that they consent or check that discussion is needed. There is also a comment section where you can say what your concerns are. If discussion is checked, the proposer meets with the person who had a concern or invites anyone who is interested or concerned to meet after dinner some evening(s) to work through the concerns, if possible. If the concerns are adequately addressed, the person(s) can then initial their

> consent. If the proposal has to be changed, it may be necessary to resubmit the revised proposal.

Nancy Lanphear adds: "Although it is stated that after the two weeks, 'no signature' indicates affirmation, some of us go after signatures and/or conversation, particularly if the plan requires money or individual participation."

If your group does not all live together, obviously this whole procedure could be altered to take place on a website.

In addition to Decision Boards, communities give their committees varying amounts of power to make decisions on behalf of the group. For example, Rob Sandelin says of Sharingwood Cohousing (Snohomish, WA), "Committees and managers can post notices, such as 'the grounds committee will meet at Judy's house on Thursday at 3 p.m. to decide about landscaping around the common house,' and anyone who is attached about that is expected to show up."

Diana Leafe Christian describes the process Earthaven Ecovillage (Black Mountain, NC) as follows:

> Each of the 11 committees has the right to make a decision that binds us all to it. However each member can read the minutes and object to a decision within a 3-week period after the committee minutes are posted. They can either say, "I have formal concerns about that; would you please revisit that decision taking into account these concerns?" Or, "I have formal concerns about that, could we please take this up in Council?" (Council is the name of our whole-group meeting, twice a month.) The committee is obligated to either revise the proposal with the person's concerns addressed and put it out again as an approved proposal in the minutes and see what happens, or take it to Council.
>
> The belief at Earthaven is that if people care enough about the community they'll read the committee minutes, and if they do, they'll either like the decisions, or don't care about that decision, or don't like it much but can live with it, or they object to it. And if they object, that they'll say so. And if they don't, they won't. It's based on the idea that we make decisions by consensus, even if we're not all in the same room, and that silence is assent. So, if they miss reading the minutes, or don't speak up, and later say "Oops, I don't like that," they missed their chance. They've got to live with the community's decision. That's why we give them a good long time: 3 weeks.

The overall goal is to preserve whole group time for things that really need live interaction of the whole. Using a Decision Board is a great efficiency improvement that could probably benefit any intentional community of more than twenty members. And committees or teams typically gain the trust of the community over time by being transparent in their process, sharing more information rather than less, and being open to input from others.