**Part 1B**

# Possible Governance Models and Processes

## Acknowledgements

## Note for new and existing groups

It is important to recognize that existing groups have different needs and processes than newly forming ones. Board/committee leadership groups will function differently than single or small-team leadership.

The most important thing is to decide whether leaders are empowered to make decisions according to their own best judgment, or whether they are expected to represent the views of the members or participants.

# Possible models of governance or decision-making

## 1) Benevolent dictatorship

- This model is often the default when an individual or small group takes the initiative to start a new event to carry out their particular vision. While they may be open to hearing feedback and suggestions, this model is based on not having to share decision-making power with potentially different priorities or preferences. These leaders may be willing to do more of the work themselves in order to maintain more control. Groups that start this way may evolve into shared leadership over time.

- This is also the model for an existing group that has a long-recognized leader.

## II) Empowered board

- An elected leader or board is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the group without much (or any) consultation with the members. The leaders are expected to carry out the group's mission, not the preferences of the participants. If participants perceive that the leadership is not implementing the mission, they can elect new leaders, but the mission of the organization should not shift based on the whims of current participants.

**Under either of these models, the benevolent dictator(s) or empowered board create guiding documents or governing policies and make other decisions themselves.**

## III) Direct democracy/town hall

- Decisions are made by the group, either through a consensus process or an agreed voting threshold. A facilitator or elected leader might lead discussion, but the actual decision-making is by the group as a whole.

# Additional models for developing organizational structure initially, or for specific conflict resolution or problem-solving

## IV) Community process

- This model is often used for an existing group that is creating guiding documents retroactively. Participants may have a general sense of shared values that have been lived for some time but have never been written down. A community process is used to identify and document these shared values.

- Alternatively, the community process may be used to clarify or change existing values. That is, there may be a feeling that the atmosphere of the group has slowly evolved to a point where some members feel it no longer reflects the sense of unspoken values which have been assumed, or which existed in the past. Existing groups may have a broad range of unspoken or assumed values, especially if the participants reflect some diversity. There could be some existing conflict about what the group's values are or should be.

- Under this model, participant input is sought and considered in crafting the statement of values. This can be done in several ways:

- ○ **Real-time community meeting** or a series of community meetings (in-person or via teleconference), perhaps with a designated facilitator, who perhaps is from outside the group: This would involve a process of brainstorming what the group's values are or should be, grouping ideas into categories, and then crafting comprehensive statements that articulate the expressed values. This process could take several meeting sessions, depending on the size and diversity of the group.

- ○ **Participant survey:** Members' views are collected regarding what they think the important values of the community are. Surveys may be conducted in several ways:

  - □ **Paper survey** at a regularly held event, usually multiple times over a designated time period so that ample opportunity is given to provide input

  - □ **Online survey** over the designated time period, which is publicized using a range of outreach tools—social media posts, email blasts, announcements and flyers at regular events, newsletter, etc.

  Survey input is then synthesized to create draft statements that articulate the expressed values. An iterative process of feedback and revision may be needed to fine-tune the statements into a final version that is accepted by the community, either by consensus or by an agreed voting process.

  *Note:* To ensure buy-in for the final result, it is important to agree upon this process for final acceptance **before** the survey and drafting process begins. This meta-level process work is especially important when the group seems to have a range of assumed values that are in conflict. Deciding in advance whether acceptance will be by consensus, or majority vote, or ⅔ vote, etc., is important. If this process is not made clear in advance, there's a risk that those who are unhappy with the outcome will feel that the process was unfair.

- Furthermore, when conflict exists that seems to stem from differing values, additional conflict resolution work may be needed. For example, suppose some folks want exciting advanced-level dancing ("we value a high-energy challenging environment") and others want everyone-is-welcome energy ("we value an easy-going atmosphere"). Discussion may require "zooming out" to identify values everyone **can** agree on: "Some of us value _____ and others value _____, but we all value _____." Through this process, shared values can be identified and a process may be developed for accommodating the range of specific preferences, for example, alternating programming or development of several separate series of events with distinct goals, all under the group umbrella. In some cases, if agreement cannot be reached, some individuals may choose to split off and create a new group with a different vision, driven by different values. This would likely be established through the benevolent dictator model (see above). The splintering of a large, diverse group into separate smaller groups with different goals is not a bad thing. On the contrary, it can be a healthy natural development and can result in greater richness for the geographic community as a whole.

## V) Hybrid

- A hybrid of benevolent dictatorship and community process is a process in which input is sought from a subset of the participants—for instance, through a series of focus groups—and then the input is synthesized by the leader(s) to craft the final values statements. This process can be a good compromise of the community buy-in that is achieved through group process and the efficiency of decision-making by leadership.

- Focus group participants could be selected in one of several ways:

  - **Leadership invitation:** Leader(s) identify the participants who are most active, or who would likely respond. The benevolence of the dictator(s) is presumed, with trust that those invited will represent the breadth of interests in the community as a whole. This model is useful when there is little conflict, or even some apathy, as people are more likely to respond when invited personally. It is risky when strong conflict exists, as leaders would have to ensure that all stakeholders truly feel represented by the focus groups. Otherwise there will not be buy-in to the final statements, and the conflict will persist.

  - **Participant application:** Anyone would be invited to apply to participate in the focus groups, and leaders would select from among the applicants, taking care that all perceived subgroups are represented by those selected. This is useful when conflict is minimal and there is some interest in participating. It can help ensure that community voices are heard and those who most strongly want to participate can do so, while also keeping the group small and manageable for more efficient discussion.

  - **Participant initiative:** In this model, the input session would be open to anyone, and several sessions could be conducted. This can be useful if some conflict exists, especially if it is considered minor. Separate focus groups could be held with different subgroups to help minimize debate during discussion and enable leaders to collect the particular views of each group. Leaders would then synthesize all views to craft the final values statements. This is a compromise model that helps all groups feel that they have been heard, but ultimately leaves the final decisions in the hands of the (presumably benevolent) dictator(s).

- None of these hybrid models is likely to be effective if there is **strong** conflict. The full community process model would likely be needed to ensure that everyone feels fully heard and that ultimately, everyone will accept the resulting values statement and the policies and procedures that will be derived from it.