

Decision-Making

LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

DISCUSSION

GUIDELINES



GORDON A. McINTOSH





DEFINITIONS:

ORGANIZATION - a local, regional or First Nation government or municipal corporation

COUNCIL - elected decision-making body

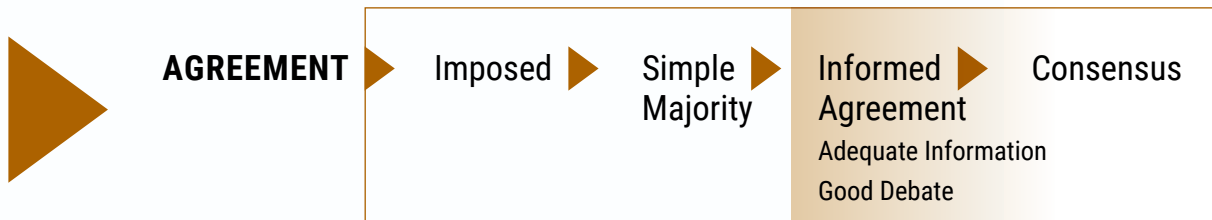
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICIAL (CEO) - elected official that presides over the governing body - Mayor, Chairperson or Reeve

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER (CAO) - principal appointed officer - Manager, Administrator, Executive Director of a local, regional or First Nation government

PURPOSE

These guidelines are premised on an ‘informed agreement’ decision making model (*see below*). This approach acknowledges the extensive amount of time required to build consensus or ‘unanimous agreement’ while rejecting the potential conflicting nature of a ‘simple majority’. It proposes tools for a transparent process to achieve ‘informed agreement’ in that everyone can support implementation of the decision even if they didn’t vote for it because there was:

- Adequate information available
- Good debate to ensure all views are heard



process

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

To clarify the steps of the decision-making process (next page) – the submission, initial referrals, resolution and follow-up:

Submission

All agenda items should have sufficient information, staff advice and clarity for council to debate the matter and make a decision – yes, no or refer/defer. It is a councillor's right to request that specific information be available before a decision is made. However, it is council that will determine if there is adequate information to achieve *informed agreement*; and if not, to *refer* the item for further information.

Regular agenda items are brought forward from a previous meeting or they are standing items that reoccur frequently. These items should have a verbal or written staff report as required with adequate information to make a decision. If there is insufficient information the item is referred to staff for further analysis.

New items that arise should be brought to council through the following process:

- All agenda items must be submitted through the CAO. Items submitted to the CEO will be forwarded to the CAO.
- The CEO and CAO review the agenda item with the elected official submitting the topic to maximize its success. Council decides whether the item is to remain on the agenda.
- All staff submissions are subject to the discretion of the CAO.
- Matters arising at the meeting may be introduced by the CAO or council member for inclusion on the agenda at the discretion of council.

New matters arising are introduced and then addressed or referred for further analysis if more information is required.

Responsibilities for agenda items are:

- **Council** – approval of all agenda items
- **CEO** – review agenda with CAO and advise councillors on their submissions
- **CAO** – review agenda with CEO and staff

Initial Referrals

The four decision choices for council include:

- **Accept as information** – no debate
- **Make a decision** – yes or no
- **Refer the item** – more information is required for an informed agreement
- **Defer the item** – more time is required to ensure a good debate

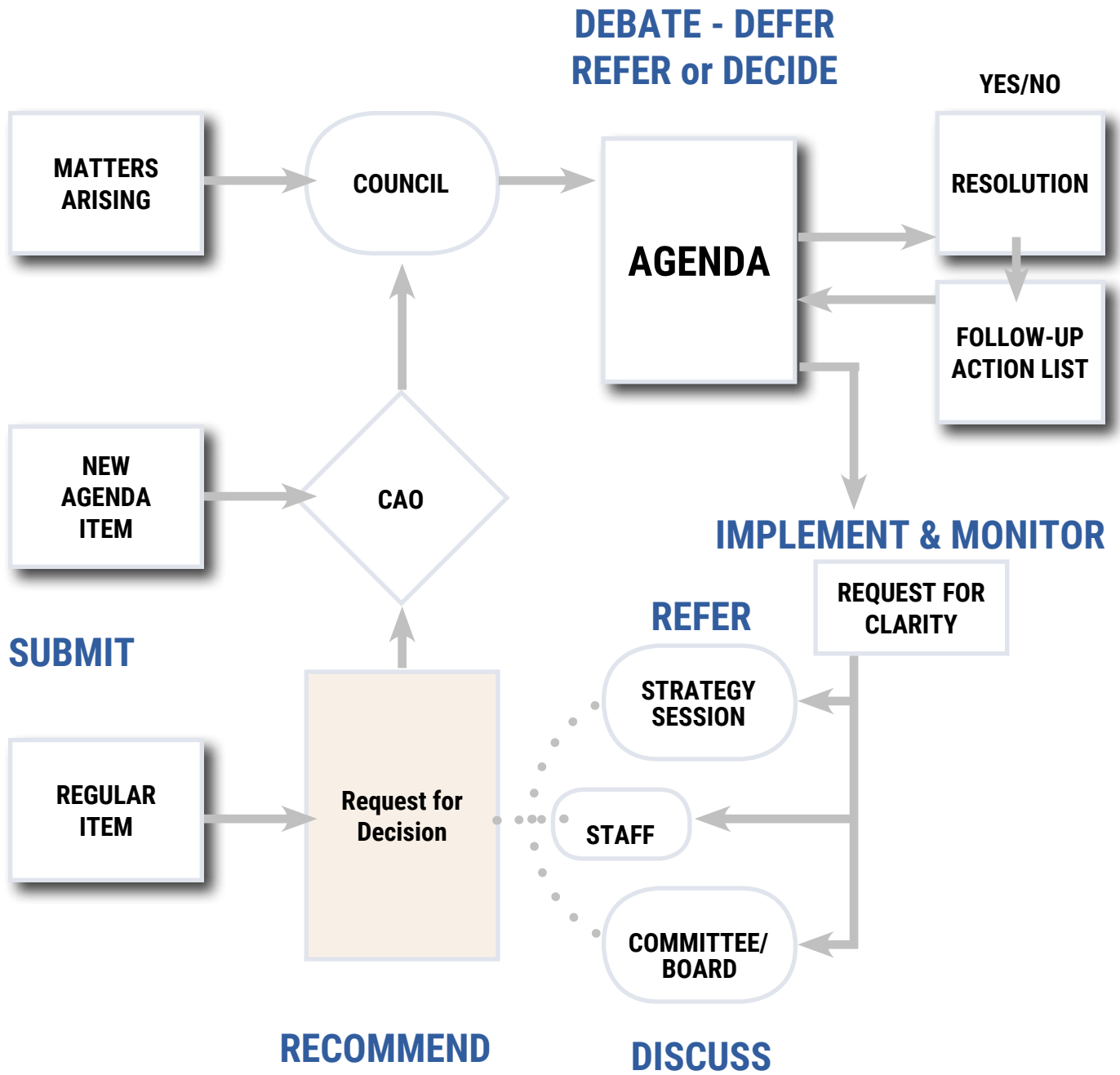
Referrals to staff occur when more information is required regarding legislative, financial and staff workload implications.

- The referral resolution should state specifically what further information is required
- All staff referrals go through the CAO

Referrals to a Committee occur when more information is required regarding policy, public interest and strategic direction implications.

- The referral resolution should state what specific information is required
- The CAO assigns staff to prepare the necessary information for the committee
- All committee responses must be reviewed for comment by the CAO

DECISION-MAKING FLOW CHART



process

Deferral or tabling motions are used when discussion is moving away from the topic and becoming personal or when there is some distraction preventing 'good debate'.

Responsibilities for referrals and deferrals are:

- **Council** – state expectations within the resolution
- **CEO** – ensure clear follow-up directions and responsibilities
- **CAO** – seek clarity regarding expectations at the time of the resolution

The Resolution

All *council direction* to staff should be given by way of resolution or 'by consent' and noted in the meeting minutes. This ensures clarity as to the intent of the council, documentation of the direction, and accountability for follow-up.

Effective resolutions include:

- **Why** – the key results or outcomes that council is looking for
- **Who** – who will take the lead responsibility for actioning the decision
- **When** – targets for involvement of council in the future
- **What** – the preferred response option to achieve the desired outcome

Responsibilities for resolution clarity are:

- **Council** – wording for self-initiated resolutions prior to or during the meeting
- **CEO** – facilitate clarity, closure or deferral of resolutions during the meeting
- **CAO** – advise council on resolutions

Follow-up

All *council directions* can be itemized on a Follow-up Action List (FUAL) (see *attachment 1*) to ensure clear expectations regarding action and monitoring while seeing the volume of council directives. It is useful to:

- Think about the impact on strategic priorities *and* day-to-day activities
- Avoid expectations council may have of staff that encroach on their personal time
- Give council confidence that its directions are being acted upon
- Celebrate achievement and results

Key features of a FUAL include:

- A cumulative list of action items from all meetings (identify source, meeting, date)
- Indicates *What, Who* and *When* for each item
- Each item has no more than five words
- FUAL items should be the result of council consent or resolution
- Items can be ordered by the date of origin, person responsible or target date

Management of the FUAL requires:

- Development of the list and dates by the CAO with staff
- Distribution of the list to staff and council
- Updating of FUAL following council or strategy meetings
- Delete items or change targets only with council's agreement
- Update of the list on a quarterly basis to assess the continued relevance of items
- Assess the list when the CAO thinks it is beyond staff's capacity

Responsibilities for the FUAL are:

- **Council** – review and disposition of items
- **CEO** – facilitate review at each business meeting or strategy session
- **CAO** – prepare and update it with staff

DECISION-MAKING INFORMATION

To clarify and provide the appropriate information required for decision makers to debate and decide on an item:

Request for Decision

The Request for Decision (*see attachment 2*) is intended to serve as an *executive summary* of the key information required for decision makers. It is a useful format to:

- Ensure council is clear and in agreement on what 'adequate information' means
- Establish what is required of staff in preparing staff reports
- Provide an 'at-a-glance' summary so there is a quick reference for decision makers
- Ensure that the CAO has oversight over all items going to council
- Serve as a 'mini agenda' for each topic

Key aspects of *the issue* include:

- **The key problem** – how the issue is defined.
- **The desired outcome** – if the issue was resolved, what would the result(s) be?
- **The preferred option** – the best alternative to achieve the desired outcome
- **Action plan** – key steps to implement the preferred option

Key implications for *the recommendation* should include:

- **Background information** – reports and data
- **Financial implications** – current or future budget
- **Organizational implications** – council and staff time
- **Strategic implications** – consistency with strategic directions and priorities
- **Policy implications** – legislation, previous resolutions or policies

Responsibilities for the direction request are:

- **Council** – approval of standard format
- **CEO** – facilitate reference to the RFD
- **CAO** – acquire complete information from staff

meetings

MEETINGS

To describe the key types of meetings of council:

The Business Meeting

The Business Meeting (including closed session or in-camera) is guided by a meeting procedures bylaw. Its primary purpose is to make decisions.

The Strategy Session

The intent of the Strategy Session is to provide a venue for more *informal discussion* of matters that are *not decision items*. Its primary purpose to develop a strategic direction so that:

- Council reaches agreement on its expectations for a strategic topic
- Staff are clear on council expectations to guide its work in advising council

The Strategy Session should be regularly scheduled. It is often referred to as a 'Committee of the Whole' meeting.

Agenda items for the Strategy Session include:

- To enhance understanding of an issue by meeting with relevant stakeholders
- To clarify expectations and improve the council/staff alignment
- To explore options to deal with an issue and provide direction to staff
- To undertake training to improve organization and individual effectiveness
- To review and update the strategic plan and priority work programs

The Request for Clarity (*see attachment 3*) can be used to help council communicate:

- The key problem – how the issue is defined?
- The desired outcome – if the issue was resolved, what would the result(s) be?
- The possible preferred options to be pursued

Responsibilities for Strategy Sessions are:

- **Council** – target dates and topics for strategic session
- **CEO** – facilitate adherence to direction setting
- **CAO** – prepare necessary information for topics and maintain schedule

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committees

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

To establish governance systems to meet the strategic and political needs of council:

Council Committees

- Make recommendations on policy matters referred by council
- Make recommendations concerning strategic issues referred by council
- Suggest topics for council consideration

Councillor Portfolios

- Present 'requests for decision' to council
- Liaise with community stakeholders at the request of council or CEO
- Liaise with external interests at the request of council or CEO
- To be well informed on activities and issues within the assigned portfolio
- Suggest topics for the consideration council

Committee Chairperson

- Chair the committee meeting
- Review agenda with staff liaison
- Present committee recommendations to council
- To be well informed on activities and issues within the assigned area

Tools

- **COMMITTEE AGENDA** – standardized format
- **MEETING SCHEDULE** – provide certainty

Success Indicators

- *Committees add value to council decision making*
- *Effective meetings that result in clear recommendations*
- *Committee/staff roles are clear*
- *Defined mandate and council expectations*
- *Clear expectations for council referrals*

FOLLOW-UP ACTION LIST (FUAL)

Attachment 1

DATE: _____

MEETING (Date) / Item / Notes	WHO (Lead)	ACTION (to/via)	TARGET (Status)

REQUEST FOR DECISION (RFD)

Attachment 2

SUBJECT: *Decision-making topic*

RECOMMENDATION: *Clear decision-making resolution answering What?, Who?, How?, When?.*

CAO COMMENTS: *Any additional comments regarding the reason for the recommendation*

RECOMMENDATION

Report/Document: Attached Available Nil

KEY ISSUE(S)/CONCEPTS DEFINED: *Define the topic, reference background material and state question to be answered*

RELEVANT POLICY: *Cite existing policies, practices and/or legislation*

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE: *To goals or priorities of current work program or other strategic documents*

DESIRED OUTCOME(S): *Main result along with highlighted requisites and benefits*

RESPONSE OPTIONS: *Possible ways to achieve the main result*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

PREFERRED STRATEGY: *Rationale for selected option – including pros and cons*

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION:

GENERAL: *Consequences to community, overall organization and/or other agencies*

ORGANIZATIONAL: *Policy change or staff work load requirements*

FINANCIAL: *Current and/or future budget impact*

FOLLOW UP ACTION: *Timelines, decision-making milestones and key products*

COMMUNICATION: *Strategy to inform, consult or involve stakeholders and public*

OTHER COMMENTS: *By others reviewing this RFD*

Submitted by: Writer _____ **Reviewers** _____

Reviewed by: CAO _____

REQUEST FOR CLARITY (RFC)

Attachment 3

SUBJECT: *Discussion Topic title*

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTION: *Next steps to develop the topic further discussion or decision?*

CAO COMMENTS: *Any additional comments regarding the suggestion.*

BACKGROUND:

Report/Document: Attached Available Nil

1. DEFINE THE TOPIC

KEY INFORMATION: *Key summary of existing information to understand the nature of the topic*

RELEVANT OBSERVATIONS: *Note issues or opportunities related to the complexity of the topic*

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS: *What needs to be known before recommendations can be developed?*

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *The key question to guide the information and analysis recommendation*

_____?

2. DETERMINE DESIRED OUTCOMES if the essential question is addressed

KEY RESULT: *The tangible outcome the organization can achieve to address the essential question.*

** _____

DESIRED BENEFITS OF KEY RESULT: *What positive conclusions are expected?*

REQUISITES: *What must happen before the key result can be achieved?*

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES: *Are there possible undesirable effects that could occur?*

3. EXPLORE RESPONSE OPTIONS to achieve the key result

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Submitted by: Writer _____ **Reviewed by:** CAO _____