



# REACHING CONSENSUS

LEVEL 3 PROJECT



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# INTRODUCTION



Consensus building is important when a decision must be made that affects a group. Each person, or stakeholder, has a unique point of view and is impacted differently by change. During the process of reaching consensus, group members work together to form an agreement that is supported by all parties. This method of decision making promotes participation and a greater sense of ownership in both the process and the outcome.

In this project, you will learn to recognize the importance of including all group members in the decision-making process, to embrace the incorporation of feedback and ideas from all stakeholders, and to lead conversations to reach an outcome that satisfies the entire group.

# YOUR ASSIGNMENT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to work with a group to practice reaching consensus on any topic.

**Overview:** Apply the techniques described in the project to practice leading a group of people toward consensus at a club meeting in 20 minutes. Choose a topic that will offer you and your group a challenge, but avoid topics that you know are unlikely to reach consensus in the timeframe. *(Note: It is ok if you cannot reach consensus in 20 minutes.)* Then, give a 2- to 3-minute closing statement on the experience or the decision.

**OR**

With the vice president education's approval, lead a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus. Prepare a 5- to 7-minute speech about the experience to give to the club. Your speech can be persuasive, humorous, informational, or crafted in any style that appeals to you and supports your speech content. Submit your signed Project Completion Form on page 23 to the vice president education.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 13.**

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Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

# ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

**5**  
EXEMPLARY

**4**  
EXCEL

**3**  
ACCOMPLISHED

**2**  
EMERGING

**1**  
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident that I can gain consensus from people with differing viewpoints or needs.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am comfortable delaying decision making until all ideas have been voiced.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident that I can lead a group to reach a decision that all parties accept.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am open to hearing feedback and ideas from all stakeholders.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

# COMPETENCIES

**The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.**

- Recognize the importance of including all group members in the decision-making process.
- Demonstrate a commitment to the process of incorporating feedback and ideas from all stakeholders.
- Create an environment where all ideas are heard.
- Lead conversations to reach a satisfactory outcome for the group.

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMPROMISE AND CONSENSUS

### CONSENSUS

Consensus requires stakeholders to work together to build an agreement that satisfies all parties. A solution developed by consensus combines the wants and needs of all parties and seeks to avoid any major concessions by any person or persons in the group. When concessions have to be made the decision is a compromise.

### COMPROMISE

A compromise requires that parties make concessions to settle on an agreement about an issue or topic.

For example, team member Anais advocates for solution zeta. Team member Jorge prefers solution alpha. Because they cannot agree, Anais and Jorge both make concessions and create a new solution that combines components of zeta and alpha. By combining elements of both they create a new, mutually acceptable solution.

### MAJORITY

Majority requires a group to accept a decision agreed upon by at least half of the members of the team.

## THE VALUE OF CONSENSUS

Not every decision requires consensus. The best reasons to reach consensus are when agreement from all or most of a group of stakeholders is required to move forward, when implementation of a decision will require a group, and when building relationships among stakeholders is as important as the decision itself.

The most profound benefit of reaching consensus is the commitment of all stakeholders to the decision that has been made. By collecting input from all parties, you insure that each person has the opportunity to express his or her thoughts and concerns. Providing for input and allowing discussion facilitates cooperation during the process of implementing any decision.

## IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

In order to make a decision based on consensus, the first step is to identify the stakeholders.

### INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Internal stakeholders are club members, teammates, project leads, or volunteers who are affected by the project or topic directly.

### EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

External stakeholders, such as members of the community, are those who do not work on your project, but will be affected by decisions or changes made.

### SET A MEETING

Assemble as many internal and external stakeholders as is possible and practical. If the group is too large, you have different options.

### ASSEMBLE INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

One option is to include only internal stakeholders in the decision-making group. Once a preferred course of action has been defined, submit it to external stakeholders for review and feedback.

## ASSEMBLE REPRESENTATIVES

A second option is to gather a group of representatives from internal and external stakeholders and come to consensus. As with the first option, once a decision has been made, submit it to all stakeholders for review.

## CONSIDER OTHER OPTIONS

There are many choices for coordinating a decision with a large group of stakeholders. The most effective process is the one that works best for you and a majority of your team.



## MANAGE THE GROUP

### CONSIDER FEEDBACK

Once you've established your decision-making group, consider feedback from any other outside sources that will be impacted. This feedback can help you form initial opinions and identify any constraints that need to be considered. Constraints could include anything that hinders the consensus process or limits decision options, such as time, location, funding, or any element that could impact the outcome.



## HANDLE COMMUNICATIONS

Define how to share information with all stakeholders in a timely manner. Set expectations for communication and follow up to help avoid conflict and confusion as you move through the decision-making process. Every step needs to be communicated, up to and including implementation.

## SUCCESSFUL CONSENSUS BUILDING

### IDENTIFY CONSENSUS POSSIBILITIES

Open the conversation by brainstorming ideas. During the group brainstorm, record everyone's ideas without any criticism or immediate evaluation. This keeps the atmosphere open and nonjudgmental.

After brainstorming, narrow your list of ideas down to possible options most appropriate to resolve the issue. Discuss each option with the group, weighing the pros and cons. Keep all feedback objective.

### KEEP CONVERSATION MOVING FORWARD

Focus on the issue at hand and do not get sidetracked. Keep conversations positive and appropriate for the topic. In many situations, levity helps keep the atmosphere relaxed and conducive to productive discussions.

### MANAGE CONFLICT

If conflict arises, manage it by avoiding personal arguments or attacks. Rather than taking sides, encourage participants to express their concerns using "I messages" and to listen to all sides before making a decision.

Shut down unproductive disagreements between group members. If a group member is disorderly or disrespectful, calmly ask her to stop. If she continues, politely ask her to step away from the meeting.

Follow this process to build a consensus.

#### Discuss Possibilities

Discuss all potential options and consider how each affects the stakeholders. From your list of potential solutions, determine what is most effective for each stakeholder group. When an answer from one individual or group is at odds with another, discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each possible solution.

## Identify Concerns

While moving through this process, identify any concerns that need to be addressed and track them until they are resolved.

## Ensure Participation

During the group discussion, ensure that every person has the opportunity to contribute. Some members of the group may need more time or prompting from a leader or other members to participate.

## Reach Consensus

As your decision is refined and options that do not fit the needs of the group are eliminated, the most challenging issues will become clear. It may be necessary to brainstorm solutions several times as concerns are raised and resolved. Consensus is reached when your group agrees on a solution.

## Repeat as Necessary

If your group is unable to reach a consensus, divide the issue into smaller problems to solve, and repeat the outlined process until a majority of interested parties and stakeholders are satisfied with the result.

## THE IMPACT OF FAILING TO REACH CONSENSUS

When consensus cannot be reached, the implications can be far-reaching for an organization. First and foremost, the group can stagnate.

A lack of decision leaves stakeholders stuck in a holding pattern until a decision can be made. At times, a single person or a smaller group may be required to make the decision and impose it on the remaining stakeholders.

The greatest challenge of imposing a solution is lack of support from stakeholders whose opinion was either not considered or disregarded. This can lead to resentment and a failure of implementation later in the process.

When consensus cannot be reached, consider breaking the decision down into smaller components. Often, consensus can be reached on incremental parts of a major decision. Breaking the process down in this way may be the step needed to move the process forward and reach full consensus.



Deciding not to decide can be the best decision. It may be beneficial in a contentious or challenging situation to stop the conversation for the time being.

Space and time can often lead to changes in thought that will contribute to agreement at a later date and allow consensus to be reached.

# CONSENSUS-BUILDING QUIZ



For the following questions, select the best answer for each question.

## 1. Consensus is reached when:

- A group of stakeholders lists all possible solutions.
- All parties involved in the decision-making process make concessions.
- An agreement is supported by all parties.
- The majority of your group agrees on a solution.

## 2. What should happen if there are still unresolved issues at the end of the consensus-building process?

- The group leader addresses the most challenging issue.
- Possible solutions are discussed again by every member of the group until a decision is agreed upon by all.
- The solution is modified and approved.
- Group members each make individual concessions to reach a solution.

## 3. Which of the following best defines a compromise?

- Decision-making process in which all parties are required to make concessions in order to reach an agreement.
- Decision-making process in which all parties collaborate to arrive at a solution that requires concessions from some group members but not all.
- Decision-making process in which all parties follow the recommendations of a leader.
- Decision-making process in which all parties are in agreement from the start.

Answers: 1. An agreement is supported... 2. Possible solutions are discussed again... 3. Decision-making process in which all parties are required... 4. Create an environment... 5. Ensuring every stakeholder...

4. Which of the following is the best way to manage conflict during the consensus-building process?

- Limit participation.
- Allow time for off-topic discussions.
- Inform stakeholders there will be no arguments.
- Create an environment of respectful listening and focused discussion.

5. Which of the following is a key component of moderating a consensus-building process?

- Discouraging unnecessary feedback.
- Reaching a solution in the first meeting.
- Ensuring every stakeholder has the opportunity to share her opinion.
- Choosing the best ideas to record for further review.

## REVIEW AND APPLY

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- What is the value of including all group members in the decision-making process?
- How can you be sure all ideas are heard during your decision-making meeting?
- What are some ways of incorporating feedback and ideas from all stakeholders?
- How can you lead conversations to reach a satisfactory outcome for the group?
- What strategies can you employ if the process of reaching consensus stalls?

## COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT



Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

**Review:** Return to page 3 to review your assignment.



**Organize:** Use the Project Checklist on page 13 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

**Schedule:** Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.



**Prepare:** Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 17–22 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 1

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to work with a group to practice reaching consensus on any topic.

**Overview:** Apply the techniques described in the project to practice leading a group of people toward consensus at a club meeting in 20 minutes. Choose a topic that will offer you and your group a challenge, but avoid topics that you know are unlikely to reach consensus in the timeframe. (*Note: It is ok if you cannot reach consensus in 20 minutes.*) Then, give a 2- to 3-minute closing statement on the experience or the decision.

**This project includes:**

- Leading a group toward consensus during a Toastmasters club meeting
- A 2- to 3-minute closing statement

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Meet with the vice president education to organize a team to help you complete your assignment. Schedule time during a club meeting to complete the consensus exercise.

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Invite your team to the meeting and be sure each member is available to attend.

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Select the challenge your team will discuss to reach consensus.

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On the day of your presentation, work with your team to reach consensus.

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- Give a 2- to 3-minute closing statement on the process and the outcome at the same club meeting.

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- After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your closing statement, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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**Additional Notes**

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# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 2

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to work with a group to practice reaching consensus on any topic.

**Overview:** With the vice president education’s approval, lead a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus. If possible, invite a club member to observe. Apply the techniques described in the project. Choose a topic that will offer you and your group a challenge. At a club meeting, deliver a 5- to 7-minute speech about the experience. Your speech can be persuasive, humorous, informational, or crafted in any style that appeals to you and supports your speech content. Submit your signed Project Completion Form on page 23 to the vice president education.

**This project includes:**

- Leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus
- A 5- to 7-minute speech
- The Project Completion Form

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Request approval from the vice president education to lead a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus.

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Organize a team to help you complete your assignment and schedule your consensus-building exercise.

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Select the challenge your team will discuss to reach consensus.

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On the day of the exercise, work with your team to reach consensus.

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Schedule your speech with the vice president education.

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Write your speech about the experience leading a group toward consensus.

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Rehearse your speech.

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Submit your signed Project Completion Form to the vice president education.

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After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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Additional Notes

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# EVALUATION FORM

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 1

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ **Speech Length:** 20-minute exercise  
2- to 3-minute closing statement

**Speech Title**

Note: If the member chose to lead a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus, then use the Evaluation Form for the second assignment option to complete your evaluation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is for the member to work with a group to practice reaching consensus on any topic.

### **Notes for the Evaluator**

Focus your evaluation on the member's ability to facilitate and maintain a discussion to reach consensus. The time is limited to a maximum of 20 minutes and at the end of that time, consensus may or may not be reached. Your evaluation is based on the process of reaching consensus and the member's ability to work well with a group.

**Listen for:** A well-facilitated discussion about the topic being discussed. The member should show respect for all ideas and contributions, regardless of their relevance. The member should give each team member an opportunity to speak.

### **General Comments**

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

# EVALUATION FORM – Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 1

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5	4	3	2	1	
EXEMPLARY	EXCELS	ACCOMPLISHED	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	
<b>Facilitation:</b> Facilitates group meeting well by keeping on task and honoring timeframe					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Inclusivity:</b> Ensures all members of group who want to contribute are able to speak					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Consideration:</b> Considers all ideas, regardless of relevance					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Manage Conflict:</b> Manages any conflict that arises with fairness and respect (select 3 if there is no conflict in the group)					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Support:</b> Supports all team members, regardless of point of view					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 1

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Facilitation

- 5 – Demonstrates exemplary skills as a facilitator by keeping on task, honoring timeframe, and making important progress toward consensus
- 4 – Demonstrates excellent skills as a facilitator by keeping on task, honoring timeframe, and making important progress toward consensus
- 3 – Facilitates group meeting well by keeping on task and honoring timeframe
- 2 – Shows some facilitation skill, but needs improvement
- 1 – Facilitation is disorganized and meeting is ineffective

### Inclusivity

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of inclusive, supportive leadership while guiding the group to consensus
- 4 – Is consistently inclusive with all members of the group and supportive of all contributions
- 3 – Ensures all members of group who want to contribute are able to speak
- 2 – Makes some effort to include all members of the group who want to contribute, but needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no effort to include all members of the group who want to contribute

### Consideration

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of valuing all ideas and contributors throughout the process of consensus building
- 4 – Sets an excellent example of valuing all ideas
- 3 – Considers all ideas, regardless of relevance
- 2 – Considers some ideas but ignores others, regardless of relevance
- 1 – Gives little credence to ideas, regardless of relevance

### Manage Conflict

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of managing conflict, showing a high level of value for every person in the group
- 4 – Sets an excellent example of managing conflict when it arises, showing value for every person in the group
- 3 – Manages any conflict that arises with fairness and respect (select 3 if there is no conflict in the group)
- 2 – Conflict management can be improved
- 1 – Poorly manages or ignores conflict within the consensus group

### Support

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of valuing all input from all members to build the best possible culture for reaching consensus
- 4 – Lends meaningful support to all ideas, including those that are not favored by the majority of the group
- 3 – Supports all team members, regardless of point of view
- 2 – Supports some team members, but not all
- 1 – Supports few team members or attempts to enforce a personal agenda

# EVALUATION FORM

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 2

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

**Speech Title**

Note: If the member chose to lead club members toward consensus during a Toastmasters meeting, then use the Evaluation Form for the first assignment option to complete your evaluation.

### Purpose Statements

- The purpose of this project is for the member to work with a group to practice reaching consensus on any topic.
- The purpose of this speech is for the member to discuss his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus.

### Notes for the Evaluator

During the completion of the project, the member led a group toward consensus.

**Listen for:** A well-organized speech about his or her experience leading a group toward consensus. The speech may be humorous, informational, or any type of the member's choosing. The speech should not be a report on the content of the "Reaching Consensus" project.

### General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

## EVALUATION FORM – Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 2

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
<b>Clarity:</b> Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Vocal Variety:</b> Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Eye Contact:</b> Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Gestures:</b> Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Audience Awareness:</b> Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Comfort Level:</b> Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Interest:</b> Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Topic:</b> Shares some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus					Comment:
<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Reaching Consensus—Assignment Option 2

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

### Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

### Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

### Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

### Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively

- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

### Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

### Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

### Topic

- 5 – Delivers an exemplary speech about some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus
- 4 – Delivers a compelling speech about some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus
- 3 – Shares some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus
- 2 – Mentions some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus, but does not fully address
- 1 – Speaks on a topic other than some aspect of his or her experience leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus

# PROJECT COMPLETION FORM

I completed all components of my "Reaching Consensus" project, including leading a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus.

Note: You are only required to submit this form to the vice president education if you chose to lead a non-Toastmasters group toward consensus.

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_

Member Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_





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