

# Chairing with consensus

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# Up front

- These are my opinions, not IETF dictum (as if we ever have that). But:
  - RFC 7282 did get some good vetting and agreement.
  - These things have been successful.
- This is part of a bigger picture on how to manage WGs.
  - Most of us are engineers, not managers.
  - Managing volunteers isn't corporate management.
  - More future sessions on WG management to come.

# Why consensus?

- Consensus is a means to an end.
  - We're doing technical work. Some choices are actually worse than others.
  - Making sure all voices are heard because just one person might be right.
  - We want to minimize politicking (packing votes, bad compromises, etc.).
- Rough consensus is to deal with actual engineering compromises.
  - Full consensus can go on forever
    - Engineering needs finite time.
  - Engineering is never perfect.
    - There's a lot of risk/reward management.
  - Eventually we need to say, "Yeah, we get it, but we're taking the risk anyway."

# Rough consensus means chair responsibility

A chair has to be able to:

- Decide that somebody is in the rough.
- Notice vote-packing and reject it.
- Put own opinion aside.
  - That includes the ability to declare yourself in the rough.
- Use good technical judgment.
  - No, that doesn't conflict with the previous point.
- Be willing to take the heat if important people disagree.
  - There's nothing wrong with getting appealed.
- Follow the discussion and do "active listening".

## “Active listening”: Move discussion to conclusion

- As discussion goes along, say what you think you know
  - “Sounds like the only objection is A” or “I believe X is in the rough”
  - If you’re wrong, you’ll hear it, and that’s good
  - If you don’t say where you are, arguments will repeat
- If you’re not sure what someone means, ask
  - Encouraging active discussion gets outcomes faster
- If you haven’t heard a response to a point, ask
  - The point isn’t to let people shout into the void
- Don’t ask questions you already know the answer to
  - Moves the discussion away from conclusion
  - This includes hums with choices that you know have support

# Can we talk about hums?

- Remember, we're avoiding votes
  - One person might have the showstopper, or obvious solution
  - Some hums are just anonymous votes
- If you need a multi-option hum, you probably need more discussion
  - What happens if you get a few quiet hums for choices 2 and 63?
- Don't do "feel-good" hums
  - Trains people to think that majority can bully the minority

# “Calling”

- A chair “calling for” consensus – Blech
  - The whole discussion is to achieve consensus
  - Makes it sound like a vote
  - Still OK to confirm, but asking for objections better
- A chair “calling” consensus at the end (or better, during) is good
  - Brings finality to the discussion
  - If you blew it, it gets fixed now

More Discussion