How to Make Good Decisions/Plans as a Group

There are few things that give a group more of sense of solidarity, staying power, and the willingness to give a project that crucial "extra 10%" of effort than beginning with a clear and shared sense of the group's goals and plan for acheiving those goals.

The 1st step in good decision-making and planning processes is to *brainstorm* from as many angles as are imaginable, asking the questions "What are our goals? What are we trying to accomplish in this project?"

Brainstorming involves generating as many ideas as possible without stopping to criticize any ideas. Everyone must keep an open mind for brainstorming to work well.

The meeting facilitator should courteously cut off any attempt to criticize. Remarks such as "it won't work," "don't be silly," "we tried it before," "too expensive," etc. and any disapproving nonverbal expressions are all out of order. Instead of criticizing, use ideas you see as imperfect, impractical, or silly as a stimulus to come up with better ones.

The person recording the results of the brainstorming should write every idea down on large sheets of paper that everyone at the meeting can see. Plenty of time should be left open for the session of brainstorming, so the group doesn't feel pressured to get on with other business.

The 2nd step in the process of decision-making and planning is to **refine the laundry list of brainstormed ideas down into a brief list of goals**: 4 to 7 statements that incorporate much of what the larger list details. These should include everything the group feels is a priority. This goals statement should be written or typed out for everyone.

The 3rd step is thinking through the steps the group needs to take to reach the goals -- specific, attainable, measurable steps that the group hopes to achieve in a given project period (within 6 months, 1 year, or whatever time frame makes sense). These can be defined in the same way, brainstorming first and then refining.

Thinking through specific steps helps you identify resources and barriers, which then shed light on and suggest additional ideas and steps.

Assess your conclusions using the SPIRO method. Ask the following 5 questions of each goal you have developed figure out whether they are "good goals":

1. Specificity - Exactly what are we trying to accomplish?
2. Performance - What will we be doing?
3. Involvement - Who will do it? Who is included?
4. Realism - Can it be done? Is it realistic?
5. Observability - Can others see the results?

The 4th step is to set out
- specific deadlines;
- tasks for each person, and;
- a timetable.

Tasks and deadlines should be written out on a calendar, and re-examined at every project meeting to see if they are realistic and if the project is progressing as planned.