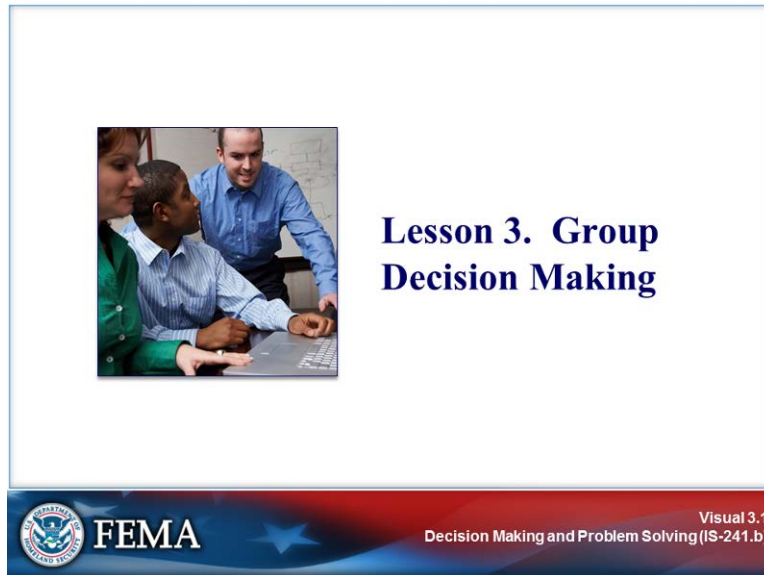

LESSON 3. GROUP DECISION MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

Visual 3.1



Key Points

When time allows, problem solving and decision making can be carried out by a group of people—a team—who have an interest or stake in the outcome.

This lesson will present strategies for effective group decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Visual 3.2

Lesson 3 Objectives

- Identify when group decision making is a good approach.
- Describe advantages and limitations of group decision making.
- Identify methods for promoting an effective group decision-making process.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.2
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

At the end of this lesson, the participants will be able to:

- Identify when group decision making is a good approach.
- Describe advantages and limitations of group decision making.
- Identify methods for promoting an effective group decision-making process.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Visual 3.3

Group/Team Decision Making

Often a good choice when:

- The situation is complex.
- Consequences are significant.
- Commitment and buy-in are important.
- There is time for deliberation and consensus building.



 **FEMA**

Visual 3.3
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Group or team decision making is often a good choice when:

- The situation is complex.
- Consequences are significant.
- Commitment and buy-in are important.
- There is time for deliberation and consensus building.

Use the questions on the following page as a guide when selecting a decision-making approach.

Lesson 3. Group Decision Making

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Visual 3.3 (Continued)

Guidance for Selecting a Decision-Making Approach

Instructions: Use the questions below as a guide when selecting a decision-making approach.

Question	Yes	No
1. Do you have a reasonable amount of time to make the decision?		
2. Does the leader have enough expertise to make a good decision?		
3. Do the potential group members have enough expertise to make a good decision?		
4. Do the others involved share the organizational goals to be attained by solving the problem?		
5. Is the decision complex with many possible solutions?		
6. Is commitment to the decision by other people critical?		
7. Is the decision likely to cause serious conflict among the people affected by it?		
8. Will the decision directly impact many agencies, individuals, or community members?		
9. Will the decision directly impact only a select few?		

Analyze your responses using the following key:

- If the response to question 1 is “No,” it may be preferable to make the decision individually or in consultation with key players.
- If the response to question 2 is “No,” it may be preferable to make the decision through consultation, with a group, or by delegation.
- If the majority of your responses are “Yes,” group decision making may be preferable.
- If the majority of your responses are “No,” individual decision making may be preferable.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Visual 3.4

Advantages

- Generates more favorable outcomes.
- Provides broader perspective.
- Taps creative potential.
- Allows increased discussion.
- Makes wider use of resources.
- Builds ownership and buy-in.



 **FEMA**

Visual 3.4
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Among its advantages, group decision making:

- Generates more favorable outcomes through synergy and shared information.
- Provides a broader perspective and taps a wider range of expertise by representing multiple viewpoints and areas of specialization.
- Taps the creative potential of team members who may come up with alternatives not envisioned by a single individual.
- Allows for discussion to help answer questions and reduce uncertainties for the decision makers.
- Makes use of a wider range of resources in applying the process and implementing the solution.
- Helps build ownership and buy-in among stakeholders.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Visual 3.5

Limitations

- Requires adequate time and good leadership.
- May result in non-optimal compromise.
- Can be overly influenced by a vocal few.
- May get bogged down by overanalysis or influenced by haste.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.5
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

There are also limitations when making decisions as a group. Group decision making:

- Requires adequate time and good leadership to be successful.
- May result in a compromise rather than the optimal solution.
- Can be overly influenced by a vocal few.
- May get bogged down by overanalysis or influenced by haste to be finished.

The following page describes some of the common pitfalls that can create problems for decision-making groups.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS**Visual 3.5 (Continued)****Decision-Making Pitfalls**

The pitfalls listed below can create problems for decision making by groups. These pitfalls can reduce the willingness of individuals within the group to:

- Examine alternatives effectively and efficiently.
- Gather or acknowledge contradictory information contrary to the group consensus.
- Be critical of the group consensus.
- Introduce and defend new or different ideas.

In general, group leaders can avoid these pitfalls through the following actions:

- Encouraging everyone to air objections and doubts and to accept criticism.
- Describing the problem without revealing their own preferred solution.
- Assigning group members to subgroups and asking each subgroup to evaluate the problem.
- Inviting outside experts to challenge the group's decision.
- Asking members to take turns playing devil's advocate.

Lack of Time	▪ When group members feel pressured by time, they may fail to gather the information necessary to make a good decision, or to consider all of the information. The result may be a hasty decision that does not consider all alternatives. ▪ Groups can help to avoid this issue by slowing down the process, assigning specific research roles to individuals or smaller teams, and ensuring that everyone in the group has added his or her perspective. ▪ Voting may be an effective method when time is short, but may polarize the group if members feel their views have not been heard.
Too Much Time	▪ Group members may spend so much time gathering and analyzing information that they fail to bring the issue to discussion or come to any conclusion. The additional time spent gathering and analyzing information may not add value to the decision that needs to be made. ▪ Groups can help to avoid this issue by facilitating agreement about the critical information needed to make the decision and by bringing the issue to discussion and decision as soon as that information is available.
Vocal Minorities	▪ One or a few members of a group may express their opinions so strongly that others hesitate to disagree or add a different perspective. A group leader who begins the discussion with a proposed decision or solution may also limit discussion. ▪ Groups can help to avoid this issue by encouraging discussion and consideration of alternate perspectives.
Groupthink	▪ Groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs in a cohesive group when members let their need to agree with each other interfere with their ability to think about the decision critically. ▪ As with vocal minorities, groups can help to avoid this issue by encouraging discussion and consideration of alternate perspectives.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Visual 3.6

Group or Individual Decision?

1. Decision makers require additional discussion to help answer questions and reduce uncertainties.
2. The decision needed is a simple one.
3. Time to make a decision is very limited.
4. Stakeholder ownership and buy-in are needed.
5. Additional resources are needed to implement an effective solution.

**FEMA**

Visual 3.6
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Instructions: Read the statements below and identify in which instances group decision making or individual decision making would be more appropriate.

Statement	Group	Individual
1. Decision makers desire additional discussion to help answer questions and reduce uncertainties.		
2. The decision needed is a simple one.		
3. Time to make a decision is very limited.		
4. Stakeholder ownership and buy-in are needed.		
5. More resources are needed to implement an effective solution.		

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.7



Key Points

The following practices will make a group's decision-making process more effective:

- Adding diversity.
- Forming smaller groups and working groups.
- Fostering consensus.
- Clarifying member roles.
- Establishing ground rules.

Additional details appear on the following pages.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.8

Add Diversity

- Key characteristic of effective groups is their diverse makeup.
- Include people who:
 - Can contribute something to the process.
 - Have a stake in the outcomes.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.8
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

A key characteristic of effective problem-solving groups is their diverse makeup. A group of people with varied backgrounds, knowledge, cultural viewpoints, and areas of expertise can usually generate a wider array of alternatives than a homogeneous group.

When selecting problem-solving group members, include people who:

- Can contribute something to the process.
- Have a stake in (will be impacted by) the outcomes.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.9

Form Smaller or Working Groups



- Research has shown:
 - Groups of 2 to 5 people work effectively.
 - Optimum size group may be 2 or 3.
- Consider dividing into subgroups or working groups.

 **FEMA** Visual 3.9
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Group size can be a tricky issue. Research has shown that groups of two to five people work effectively, and that the optimum-size group may be two or three people.

The many different specialties and stakeholders in emergency management may quickly lead to an unwieldy group size.

Consider dividing into subgroups or working groups that focus on different aspects of the problem.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.10

Foster Consensus

Consensus building means bringing people together to:

- Express ideas.
- Clarify areas of agreement or disagreement.
- Develop shared resolutions.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.10
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Consensus building means bringing people together to express their ideas, clarify areas of agreement and disagreement, and develop shared resolutions.

It does not mean everyone agrees that a decision is optimal. Rather, it means a decision is reached that everyone can live with; in other words, the decision addresses stakeholders' most important issues.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.11

When Is Consensus Reached?

Even if it was not their choice, members can:

- Support the decision.
- Work toward its implementation.



 **FEMA**

Visual 3.11
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

You know you've reached consensus when each member can say:

- "My personal views and ideas have been listened to and considered."
- "I have openly listened to and considered the ideas and views of every other group member."
- "I can support this decision and work toward its implementation, even if it was not my choice."

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.12

Techniques for Reaching Consensus



- Agree on criteria.
- Avoid win/lose techniques.
- Expand the alternatives.
- Continue the discussion.

**FEMA**

Visual 3.12
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Some techniques for reaching consensus are described below.

Techniques for Reaching Consensus

Technique	Description
Agree on Criteria	Agree on criteria in advance that will be used to decide. This may help narrow options to a manageable field.
Avoid Win/Lose Techniques	Avoid win/lose techniques, such as voting or negotiating favors back and forth. However, weighted voting or multivoting (giving each member a set number of weighted votes to cast on multiple options) can be used to narrow options.
Expand the Alternatives	Expand the alternatives when an either-or debate is going nowhere. Look for alternatives that are the next most acceptable as ways to break a stalemate.
Continue the Discussion	Continue the discussion. Don't encourage members to give in to keep harmony.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.13

Clarify Member Roles

Identify in advance whether:

- Members are equal participants in collaboration.
- Members have decision-making authority.
- Members can make commitments for their organizations.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.13
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

Collaboration is more effective when stakeholders are from varied backgrounds and perspectives. However, differences may lead to conflicts about power and control.

To foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders, it is important to get agreement on member roles and identify whether:

- All members are equal participants in the collaboration process.
- Members have decision-making authority.
- Members can make commitments for their organizations.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.14

Establish Ground Rules

Examples:

- Establish an agenda in advance.
- Start and end on time.
- Turn off cell phones, limit side conversations, listen before adding new ideas, and speak respectfully.



**FEMA**

Visual 3.14
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

A simple list of ground rules can make a huge difference in the tone and feeling of a meeting. Examples include:

- Establishing an agenda in advance for each meeting.
- Starting and ending meetings on time.
- Asking members to turn off cell phones, limit side conversations, listen before adding new ideas, and speak respectfully.

Some sample ground rules are listed on the following page.

MORE EFFECTIVE GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.14 (Continued)

Sample Collaborative Group Ground Rules

Confidentiality. Group members agree not to repeat what other group members have said outside of the meeting without their permission, even to other collaborative group members.

Play or Pass. Group members will help maintain forward progress by making decisions in meetings (announced reasonably in advance of meetings to all collaborative group members) with the group members present. Also, group members in attendance at a meeting have the right to pass in a discussion or decision, as long as they still do their part to make the group function.

Openness. Group members agree to remain open to other points of view, to all group members, and to the group process and its outcomes.

Listening. Group members agree to focus on each speaker rather than prepare their response, as well as allowing for no interruptions.

Fairness. Group members are committed to equal access and participation in the group.

Respect and Conflict. Group members agree that they may disagree without being disagreeable. Whenever there is conflict that interferes with the group's forward progress or performance, group members will cooperate to address the conflict.

Commitment to the Group. Group members will prepare for and attend meetings. They agree that they will begin and end meetings on time. If a group member cannot attend, he or she will send a representative and/or get briefed on what was missed.

Resources and Competition. Group members must be willing to make resource contributions to the group's success, including individually (e.g., their skills and talents), organizationally (e.g., providing meeting space for free), and collectively (e.g., working together to obtain resources for the group's work).

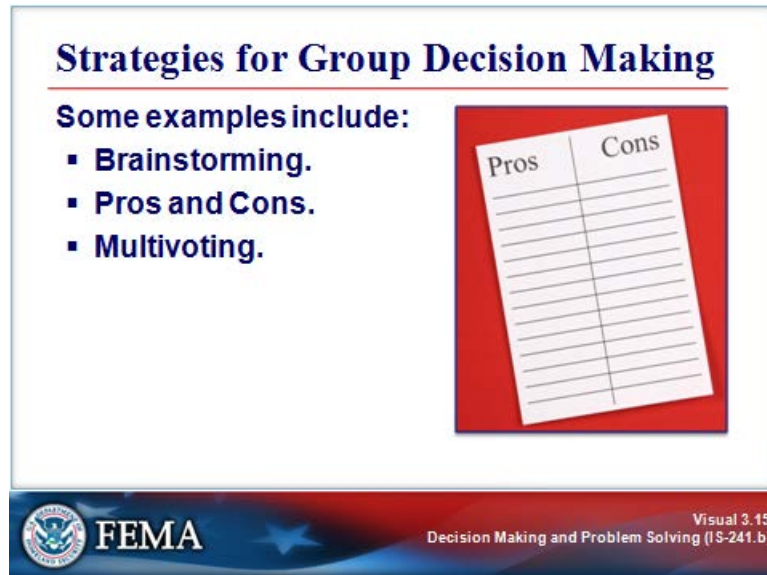
Commitment to Results. Group members will maintain a commitment to achieving results by working together.

Assume Good Intent. Group members agree to assume good intent when interacting in the group and to clarify meaning before jumping to conclusions.

Commitment To Work and Play Hard Together. Group members will work hard together, but also have fun and celebrate their successes together.

STRATEGIES FOR GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.15



Key Points

There is a vast array of strategies that groups can use to enhance their decision-making process. Some examples include:

- Brainstorming.
- Pros and Cons.
- Multivoting (covered on the following page).

Brainstorming

The focus of brainstorming is to generate ideas and solutions, not to evaluate them. It requires an environment in which the participants (individuals or group members) are free to think out loud, without criticism. Ground rules for brainstorming should include:

- No criticism of an idea is allowed.
- Strive for the longest list possible. Go for quantity.
- Strive for creativity. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
- Build (“piggyback”) on the ideas of others.

Pros and Cons

The group lists each option on a separate piece of paper with two columns: Pros and Cons (or Advantages/Disadvantages).

In each column list as many effects and implications as you can think of. If helpful, give each a weight factor from 1 to 5 to indicate its significance. When finished, total the scores and compare the pro and con scores for each option.

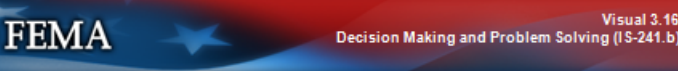
STRATEGIES FOR GROUP DECISION MAKING

Visual 3.16

Multivoting

- Each person voting has a designated number of votes.
- A person may distribute votes as desired among the options.
- Can be used to narrow options or select one option.



 **FEMA**  Visual 3.16
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Key Points

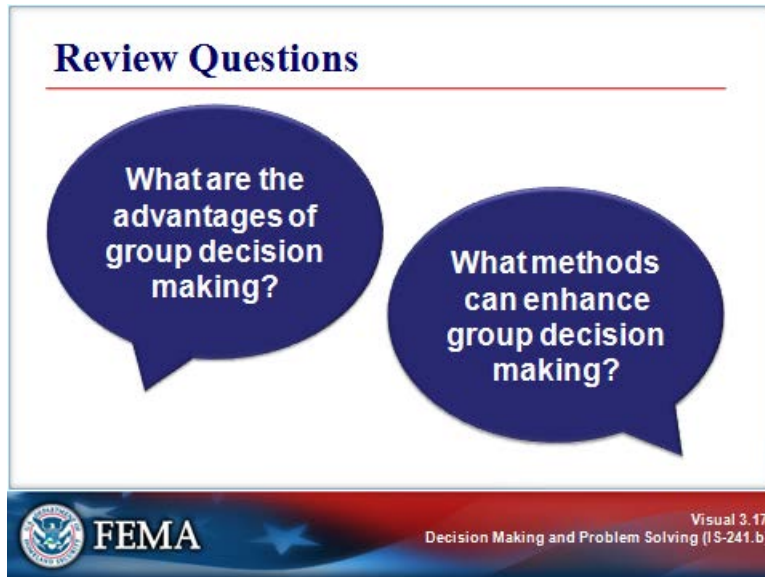
Multivoting

Multivoting is used to reduce a long list of items to a manageable number by means of a structured series of votes. Each person is given a number of votes to cast, equal to one-third of the total alternatives. (For example, if there are 30 alternatives, each person gets 10 votes.)

An easy way to use multivoting is to list the alternatives on separate sheets of paper and provide self-adhesive colored dots. After each person casts all of his/her votes, the votes are tallied and the items receiving the fewest votes are eliminated. Rounds are repeated until a manageable list is achieved.

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

Visual 3.17



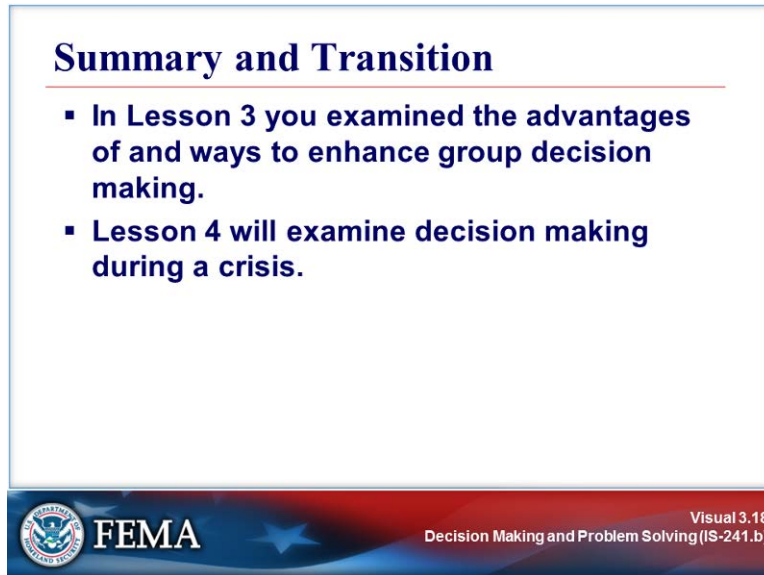
Key Points

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the advantages of group decision making?
2. What methods can enhance group decision making?

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

Visual 3.18



Key Points

In Lesson 3 you reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of group decision making and strategies for effective group decision making.

Lesson 4 will describe the context for crisis decision making and present strategies for applying the problem-solving model.

Notes