Community Crew: Designing Fair Decision Systems

Materials Needed

- Chart paper or large whiteboard
- Markers of various colors
- Index Cards or sticky notes (50 minimum)
- Timer or stopwatch
- Printout or digital display of the "Green Space Dilemma" scenario
- Tally sheets, ballots, or a simple online poll tool (for voting)
- Small objects (e.g., 10-20 LEGO bricks, paper clips, or coins) for the resource game
- Student notebook or project binder

Module 1: Why Do We Need Rules? (30 Minutes)

Hook and Objectives

Hook: Imagine you and two friends find a secret treasure chest containing five amazing, unique items. How do you decide who gets what? If everyone argues, nothing is fair and someone might end up unhappy. Today, we are learning how communities set up systems to make tough decisions fairly.

Learning Objectives (Tell them what you'll teach)

By the end of this long lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define "governance" and identify three major ways groups make decisions (like voting or teamwork).
2. Analyze a community problem and propose a decision-making system designed for fairness.
3. Participate in a simulation, demonstrating how good decision systems influence the well-being and happiness of a community.

Activity: Quick Community Survey (15 Minutes)

Instructions: Use sticky notes or index cards to answer these questions:

1. What is one rule at home or school that you think is very fair?
2. What is one decision that affects our whole town/neighborhood (e.g., trash pickup, speed limits)?
3. If you could decide how to spend $100 donated to your community, what would you spend it on?

Discussion: Share answers. Highlight that decisions about shared things (resources, rules) require a system so everyone feels heard.

Module 2: I Do / We Do – The Tools of Decision-Making (75 Minutes)

I Do: Modeling Governance Systems (25 Minutes)

Concept Introduction: Governance is simply the system of rules, practices, and people that decide how a group operates. We look at three main types:

- **Hierarchy/Expert Rule:** One person or a small group of experts makes the final decision (e.g., a CEO, a parent, a firefighter chief). *Good for: Quick decisions, safety. Bad for: Representing diverse voices.*
- **Majority Rule/Voting:** The choice that gets 51% or more of the votes wins (e.g., choosing a class president, electing a politician). *Good for: Efficiency, clear outcome. Bad for: The 49% who lose might feel ignored.*
- **Consensus:** Everyone agrees on the decision, or at least agrees they can live with it. This takes a lot of discussion and compromise. *Good for: Strong community support, high fairness. Bad for: Takes a very long time.*

Modeling Example: Imagine choosing a flavor of ice cream for the whole group.

- *Hierarchy:* The teacher chooses.
- *Majority Rule:* We vote vanilla vs. chocolate.
- *Consensus:* We discuss until we find a flavor everyone truly likes (maybe swirl!).

We Do: The Community Resource Game (50 Minutes)

Goal: Experience how different systems impact fairness when resources are scarce.

Setup: You have 15 small objects (the community's budget/resources). We have three competing community needs (represented by index cards).

- **Need A:** Fixing the potholes on Main Street (Needs 8 items to complete).
- **Need B:** Starting a new after-school tutoring program (Needs 5 items).
- **Need C:** Cleaning up the pollution in the local river (Needs 7 items).

Round 1: Majority Rule (15 Minutes)

Instructions: Each learner advocates for one need. Vote for which need gets the most funding first (they must get at least 8 items). After the vote, distribute the 15 items based on the winner, and see what is left for the others.

Reflection: Did one need dominate? Did the other needs feel represented? Was the decision quick?

Round 2: Consensus Rule (25 Minutes)

Instructions: Now, the group must discuss and compromise until everyone agrees on a distribution plan that addresses *all* three needs, even if partially. (Example solution: 5 for A, 4 for B, 6 for C).

Reflection: How did this process feel? Was it slower? Do you think the community would be happier with this result, even if no single need was fully met?

*** BREAK / TRANSITION (15 MINUTES) ***

Module 3: Project Phase 1 – The Green Space Dilemma (90 Minutes)

Real-World Relevance & Scenario Brief

Scenario: A large, unused piece of land (a "green space") in the middle of town has become available. The town council needs to decide how to use it. If the decision is unfair, it could hurt the community for decades.

The Competing Proposals:

1. **The Community Garden Coalition:** Wants to use the space for food gardens, teaching classes, and composting. Focus: environment, health, and skill-building.
2. **The Youth & Family Group:** Wants to build a new, modern playground and a sports field. Focus: recreation, health, and child well-being.
3. **The Local Business Alliance:** Wants to turn part of it into a much-needed parking lot for downtown businesses and shoppers. Focus: economic growth and convenience.

Activity: Taking on Roles (45 Minutes)

Instructions (I do/We do): The learner(s) will take on the role of the Decision-Making Committee, but first, they must deeply understand the different perspectives.

1. **Role Assignment:** Assign specific stakeholder roles (Garden Coalition, Youth Group, Business Alliance). (If only one learner, they rotate through the roles, spending 10 minutes deeply researching and writing down the priorities for each role.)
2. **Evidence Gathering:** What evidence supports each group? (Example: Garden Coalition cites statistics on local food deserts. Business Alliance cites lack of downtown parking leading to lost sales.)
3. **Drafting Demands:** On index cards, write down the three most critical demands for each group. (e.g., Business Alliance demands 50 parking spots.)

Success Criteria for Role-Playing: I have clearly articulated the strongest arguments and the minimum requirements for all three stakeholder groups.

Designing the System (45 Minutes)

Instructions (You do – Design): The primary task of the committee is not to vote yet, but to design the *fairest decision system* possible for this specific problem.

1. **System Analysis:** Review the three primary systems (Hierarchy, Majority, Consensus). Which one alone will fail to protect a minority voice?
2. **Proposal:** Design a hybrid system. (Example: "We will use Majority Rule to narrow the options from three down to two, but then we must use Consensus to agree on the final details of the chosen option.")
3. **Justification:** Write a brief paragraph justifying why your chosen system is the most responsible way to represent different voices and ensure the community's well-being.

Scaffolding: Provide a template: "Our Decision System will use [System A] for the overall choice, but requires [System B] to finalize the budget/details to protect minority rights."

Module 4: Project Phase 2 – Debate, Vote, and Responsibility (75 Minutes)

The Decision Workshop (45 Minutes)

Procedure: Now apply the custom decision system designed in Module 3.

1. **Presentation of Cases (15 min):** Have the learner(s) (in their stakeholder roles) briefly present their three key demands for the Green Space.
2. **The Debate (15 min):** The Decision-Making Committee facilitates a debate, encouraging compromise. What small piece of land or funding could be shared? (e.g., Can the playground only take up 75% of the space so a small garden can exist?)
3. **Applying the System (15 min):** Execute the steps of the custom-designed system. If it involves voting, cast the ballots. If it involves consensus, continue discussion until an agreement is reached.

The Responsibility Checklist (30 Minutes)

Instructions: Once the final decision is made (e.g., "We will build the playground, but dedicate 10% of the space for a small community garden"), analyze the outcome.

Q&A (Formative Assessment):

- Who "won" the most resources or influence?
- How does the decision influence the well-being of the entire community (not just the winners)? (Focus on the environment, economic health, and social life.)
- What is the responsibility of the Decision-Making Committee to the groups that lost the vote? (Example: The responsibility is to explain the decision clearly and ensure their voices are heard next time.)
- Did the system you designed lead to a fair outcome? Why or why not?

*** BREAK / TRANSITION (15 MINUTES) ***

Module 5: Conclusion and Reflection (30 Minutes)

Recap (Tell them what you taught)

Key Takeaways: Review the difference between Majority Rule, Consensus, and Hierarchy. Emphasize that the most fair and responsible communities use hybrid systems to balance efficiency with representation.

- A good system helps solve problems, even when people disagree.
- Fairness means everyone feels represented, even if they don't get exactly what they want.

Summative Assessment: Reflection Essay/Presentation

Prompt: Write or present a 3-minute reflection on the lesson. Focus on the following:

1. Describe the most challenging part of designing a fair system.
2. Explain how the decision about the Green Space specifically impacted fairness and community well-being (e.g., "The compromise made the air cleaner [well-being] but angered the businesses [fairness issue].").
3. What is the most important responsibility of a decision-maker in a democracy?

Differentiation and Extension

Scaffolding (For learners needing extra support): Provide pre-written templates for the debate arguments and the system justification paragraph.

Extension (For advanced learners): Instead of the local Green Space Dilemma, redesign the decision-making system used by the United Nations to address a major global environmental issue (e.g., plastic pollution or deforestation). Which stakeholders are missing from the current system?