



## + COLOURED CARDS

Every participant has a set of six coloured cards, which are used in meetings in two different ways:

### DISCUSSION MODE

Each person wishing to speak raises the appropriate card at any time during the discussion. The facilitator calls on people to speak according to the following priority:

1. **Black**   
*I have an interpersonal difficulty that is preventing my full participation*
2. **Red**   
*I have a process observation, e.g. the discussion is off the subject*
3. **Orange**   
*I have a proposal*
4. **Yellow**   
*I have a question, or need clarification*
5. **Green**   
*I can provide clarification*
6. **Blue**   
*I have a comment or opinion*
7. **Wave Hand**   
*I wish to acknowledge someone or something*

Black cards have first priority, and the holder is asked to state their difficulty and how they would like the matter dealt with. The group then decides whether this should be processed within the meeting or between the individuals concerned.

The red card has the next priority, and is used to point out a process issue such as a breach of procedure, discussion going off-topic or over-time, or to make a group observation. Next, people holding up orange cards are called upon to deliver their acknowledgment/s.

After a question has been asked using a yellow card, people raise green cards to provide clarification. Only after all questions have been answered does the facilitator call on those holding blue cards to state their comments and opinions.

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Continued...

## DECISION MAKING MODE

When the group is ready to make a decision following a period of discussion, each person chooses a card to indicate their level of support for the proposal as follows:

- 1. Red**   
*I am entirely against the proposal and will block consensus*
- 2. Orange**   
*I have a serious reservation but I am not willing to block consensus*
- 3. Yellow**   
*I have a question to be answered before I can make a decision*
- 4. Blue**   
*I am neutral or basically for the proposal with some slight reservations*
- 5. Green**   
*I agree with the proposal at hand*

If orange or red cards are raised, those people get to voice their concerns if they have not already done so. At this point the current proposal may be amended to address concerns. A second show of cards then follows. On the second carding a proposal is passed unless red cards are still being raised.

**If consensus is not reached**, the proposal is sent back to the appropriate focus group for more work. If consensus is still not reached at a subsequent meeting, and the proposal is considered both important and urgent, the decision can be made by a 75% majority vote of people eligible to take part in the decision-making.

Earthsong has only gone to a vote twice in the 15-year history of that project, both at crucial times during development when the consequences of having the decision stopped or delayed would have been serious. Our commitment is to working issues through to reach consensus if at all possible, but the voting backstop means that progress can't be stopped by a veto of one or two people.

### **Groups have found the coloured card system to be extremely useful** in

encouraging every member in the room to participate in discussion and decision-making. Dominant personalities find it harder to push their ideas through at the expense of less vocal members, and softer-spoken members find it easier to voice their concerns. The shades of meaning in the decision-making mode allows members to voice reservations while still allowing the proposal to proceed.

Another important element of this system is that full minutes record discussion points and all decisions, and are circulated to all participants after the meeting.

### **Any participant absent from a meeting**

may request to revisit a decision made at that meeting, at the next meeting only. Otherwise decisions may only be reopened with the prior agreement of 50% of participants. This provision honours a participant's right to have a say in issues they feel strongly about even when they were not able to be present at that meeting, but avoids the situation where decisions could be continually reopened unless it is clear that there is broad support to have another look at a particular issue.