

Woodard Lane Cohousing Governance Practices

A written guide and learning experiment for living together at WLCH, through May 31, 2027.

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I. Summary

Woodard Lane Cohousing Community governance is based on traditions established at our founding and principles of Sociocracy also known as Dynamic Governance. We govern at All-Community Meetings and through a network of semi-autonomous circles, linked by shared membership, each with a purpose (aims) and area of responsibility (domain). Decisions and policies are made with the consent of circle members. We govern for the benefit of the whole community. We aim to improve through experimentation, and reviewing our decisions. We create our vision, while expressing our values (see attachments), by working towards our aims.

II. Aims

Aims are used by members to guide the work of circles in service to the whole community.

Woodard Lane Cohousing aims to create a self-managed multigenerational residential community that:

1. Encourages growth, respect and kind relationships among residents.
2. Fosters broad participation in inclusive, effective, and collaborative governance.
3. Maintains and stewards our buildings and lands.
4. Protects WLCH's financial and legal integrity.
5. Limits our consumption to benefit life on earth.

III. Our Circle Structure

We govern ourselves with a network of interlinked circles (see Figure A). All adult residents including renters, as well as nonresident owners are full participants in governance, circles, and All-Community meetings. Each circle is responsible for making decisions with the consent of circle members and soliciting input from community members (all residents and owners) that will be significantly affected by a decision. Circles are linked by shared members that work in both circles (see Roles). Work circles manage the operations of the community, and make decisions within their domain. A mission circle considers longer-range challenges and legal requirements. Two members from the mission circle and two from each work circle gather in a Coordination Circle.

Our system is integrated with our state-required corporate structure; the mission circle contains the board of directors, and corporate membership (the owners as represented by one vote per unit) assembles at All-Community Meetings. This system of governance represents an agreement among corporate members.

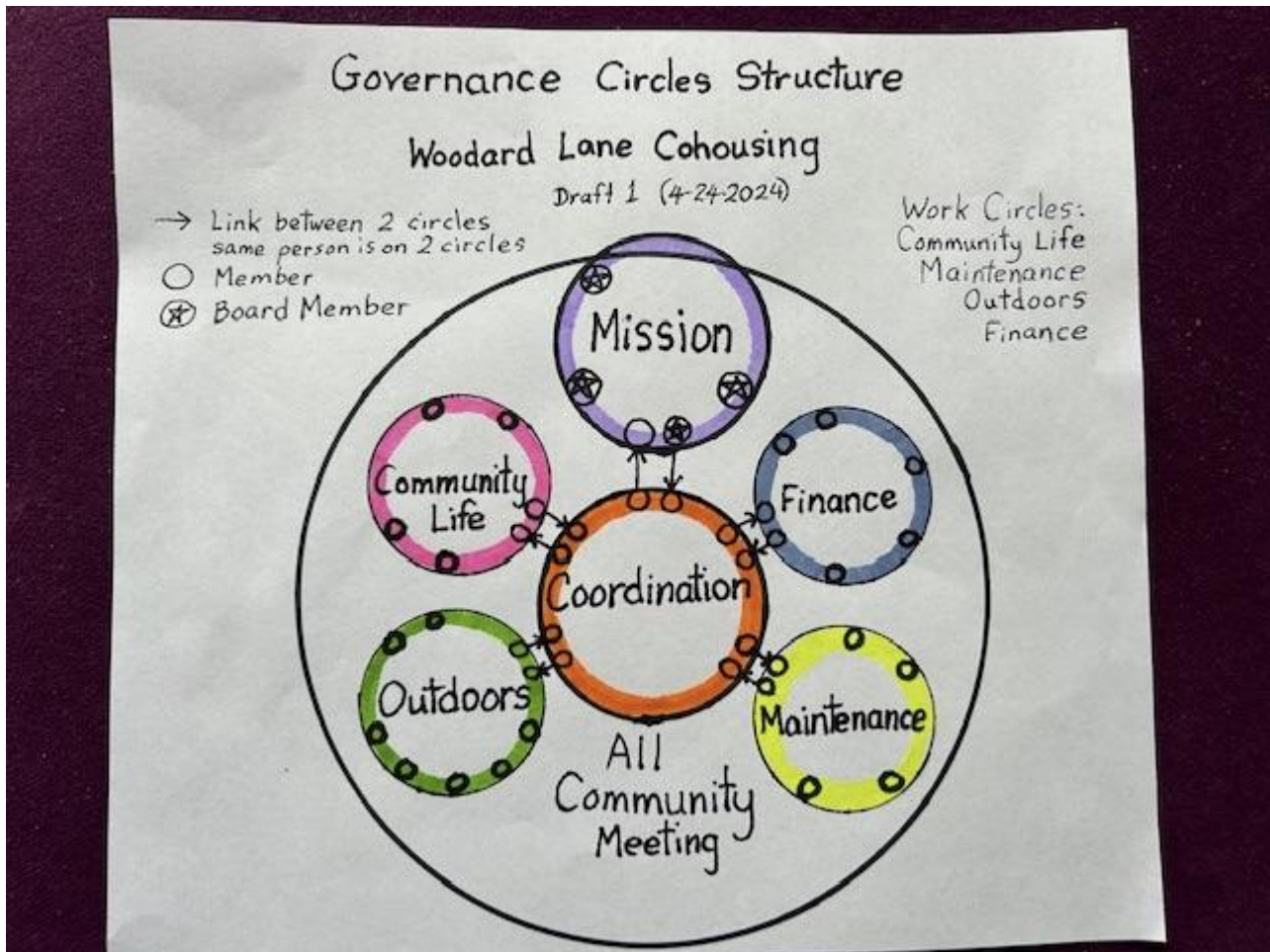


Figure A (the above sketch was approved 4-30-2024)

IV. The All-Community Meeting

All-Community Meetings are unique assemblies that are open to all community members. A meeting has the ability to make any decision, as long as the meeting is announced and convened consistent with state law. Members discern carefully what content and decisions are worth taking time on at an All-Community Meeting. The aims of All-Community Meetings include:

1. Giving Input and Feedback: Any circle can request time on an All-Community Meeting agenda for the purpose of generating input or feedback that will help that circle make a decision. These "Community Conversations" are focused on exploration, dialogue and understanding, not decision-making. The All-Community Meeting includes a "Temperature Reading," where emergent issues can be brought to the attention of the whole community, responded to, put on the backlog, and/or put on the agenda.
2. Learning and Community Building: Learning about governance, communication skills and anything that is useful to the community (finances, first aid, permaculture design, NVC, etc.) Telling life stories, sharing what is meaningful in people's present lives, celebration, anything that builds connection among community members.
3. Decision making: Decision making that happens at the All-Community level includes those decisions that All-Community is legally bound to engage in and those that are determined by

the community to warrant All- Community consent.

- a. Decisions that are legally required to be made at the All-Community level.
 - i. Approval of Board Directors.
 - ii. Changes to Condo Declaration and its amendments, Bylaws and its amendments, and agreements with local governments.
 - iii. Annual budget decisions, budget revisions that impact the monthly fees of community members, and/or decisions regarding special assessments. (Note: non-property owners can voice their concerns but may not object during the consent round for decisions regarding Association finances).
- b. Decisions the community chooses to make at the All-Community level in general represent decisions that would benefit from full community thinking and consent. The decisions most likely to come to All-Community may include:
 - i. Revision of, deletion of, or addition of major policy for example 'Common House Policy'
 - ii. Significant and permanent changes to the physical community (for example, adding a new building or structure)
 - iii. Significant impact on members in terms of money, housing, and/or liability (for example, a major change in what is covered by insurance, adding a new unit, a change in the framework how condo fees are assessed)
 - iv. Significant changes to the governance structure for example changing circle domains
 - v. Use of temperature reading to rapidly respond to small issues.

The Temperature Reading

The temperature reading is an important part of All-Community Meeting because anyone may bring up issues and concerns to the All-Community Meeting. There are 4 sections to Temperature Reading:

1. Appreciations - where members identify what they are appreciating.
2. Concerns - expressed using a Nonviolent Communication [NVC] approach (see attachments)
3. Puzzles and New Information - for describing changes or tensions that are emerging (for example: I lost my keys, my mom's moving in with me, I'm leaving the Maintenance Circle to join Finance.)
4. Hopes and Wishes - for cohousing, for our lives or for the world.

V. Coordination Circle

Coordination circle is responsible for carrying out Woodard Lane's vision and aims and serves as the place of connection and communication among Work and Mission Circles. The Coordination Circle is responsible for:

1. Arranging All Community meeting agendas and plans for their facilitation
2. The well-being of the Work Circles, and that their essential work is completed, including resolving any gaps or overlap in domains.

3. May make decisions in any areas not otherwise delegated to Work Circles, Mission Circle and All Community.
4. Supporting the review and updating of all policies
5. Maintaining the flow of information among the Work Circles, Mission Circle and All-Community.
6. Adjusting the operating budget.

The Coordination Circle is composed of two links with each Work Circle and the Mission Circle. See circle roles below.

The Budget Process To Be Developed. This is a placeholder for it to be added at a later date.

VI. Mission Circle

Mission Circle takes the long-term perspective, past and future, and engages the community in refining and strengthening the aims of Woodard Lane Cohousing as an intentional community.

1. Ensures our governance systems and its relevant documents are accessible, current, coherent, and serve our aims.
2. Establishes and ensures the maintenance of an administrative record consistent with the needs of the community and state law.
3. Develops and maintains a collective and precise understanding of the legal requirements and processes of our corporation and reviews legal requirements at least annually.
4. Develops and refines a yearly pattern of All-Community Meetings and other important dates and provides an annual All-Community calendar as a proposal to Coordination Circle.
5. Works with All Community to maintain and share a long-term vision of community goals and objectives, including annual visioning event.
6. Creates and sustains mutually beneficial relationships between WLCH and its neighbors, including institutions and governments. Other circles may do this as well.

State law requires us to have a Board of Directors. We intend to have 4 board directors and all board directors are members of the Mission Circle and at least one sits on the Coordination Circle. Additional Mission Circle members can come from within or from outside the community, bringing perspectives, inspiration, and expertise.

The Board of Directors has legal authority to make any decision on behalf of the community except for the decisions that must be made at the All-Community level (see All-Community Meeting description above). The board aims to minimize the use of this authority. Most decisions that are made at this circle are made by the entire Mission Circle. The times that the Board may need to exercise this authority will usually be items of a time-sensitive or legal nature. Decisions that require the signature of the board are generally given to the board for ratification after a decision is consented to by a circle (for example, the creation of a bank account).

Board Election and The Annual Meeting

We complete several steps to identify a slate of directors to be considered at our Annual Meeting. Before the annual meeting, the existing board will select one currently serving member to continue for another year, to provide continuity. In addition, the Coordination Circle

will nominate, with the individual's consent, one Board member for a one-year term. At the All-Community Meeting members will nominate and select a member to serve on the board and Mission Circle for a two-year term. One member of the board selected by the community in the previous year will be carried over. At this or any subsequent All-Community meeting members may nominate and select community members to fill empty board positions. After board members are selected they must also be approved at an All-Community Meeting following the requirements of State Law.

VII. Work Circles

The Work Circles are a set of circles that divide up the daily work of the community. Currently, the Work Circles of WLCH are Finance, Community Life, Outdoor, and Maintenance. Each Work Circle has aims, a domain, a lead, a secretary, a facilitator, and links. The Coordination Circle is made up of the links chosen by the Coordination Circle and the second links chosen by each Work Circle and the Mission Circle.

Creating Circles

Any circle may choose to create a sub circle to attend to a particular portion of its domain, or the need for a circle can emerge anywhere in governance. Sub circles need only be created where there is a need to develop and sustain policies over time. A sub circle is linked to its parent circle and is given a specific domain and aims by its parent circle. Examples include the Garden Circle created by Outdoors. Work may also be more efficiently delegated through Roles (discussed below) or temporary efforts managed by Helping Circles.

Helping Circles

Helping Circles are temporary circles created by an existing circle (or circles) to research and recommend actions, carry out short-term work assignments, or develop a proposal to bring back for approval to their parent circle. Helping Circles may also originate at All-Community Meetings. Their domain and decision authority is described as a decision at their inception.

The Operation of Circles

Circles refine our community aims to guide work within their domain. Circles define a domain distinct from other circles and with the consent of their parent circle which ensures there are no gaps or overlaps in domains.

Circle Membership

Members may request to join any circle and circles may indicate a need for more members at any time. The request to join a circle is put on the Circle agenda to be discussed with the prospective member present. Existing members of the circle decide on a change of membership by consent.

The Circle Record

Circles record the content of their meetings with the level of detail they deem necessary, within the standard necessary for our corporate administrative record. All decisions must be recorded verbatim, and include a review date. Circles maintain records accessible to the full community that include but are not limited to 1) the circle's aim and domain, 2) members and role descriptions, and 3) policies, decisions with documentation, and meeting minutes.

When circles make decisions, they record those decisions and notify the community through the member's email list, with DECISION in all caps in the subject line. This is explained more fully under "Documenting and Sharing Decisions" below.

Visitors To Circle Meetings

Community members may observe any circle meeting. Any member can request to be heard by any circle. Non-circle members do not participate in the meeting without the circle's consent. The circle may choose to invite anyone to present or comment on any topic at any time. The circle may choose to include a non-member in rounds. Only circle members participate in consent rounds.

Circle Roles

Each member of a circle is responsible for the functions of the circle and commits to 1) regularly attend meetings and notify about absences, 2) work toward circle aims between meetings, 3) make an effort to sustain a quality of connection among members that supports the circle's ability to achieve its aims and make an effort to resolve any interpersonal conflicts within the circle and 4) offer and graciously receive feedback. A circle may define additional criteria that are clear, transparent, and relevant to a circle's aims and domain.

Roles in circles are distinguished between roles to do with circle functioning (Circle roles) and roles that are connected to the domain of the circle (Operational roles).

Circles use consent to select individuals to perform the roles outlined below. We use the sociocratic nomination process to fill these roles, rather than relying on volunteerism, so that everyone involved understands and supports the effectiveness of the role. A single member may fill multiple roles, but we strongly discourage combining secretary, and facilitator roles and recognize that it is important to adequately support the Coordinator role.

- Coordinator - The Coordinator is a critical role in a circle and the member selected must be fully engaged for governance to function well. The Coordinator:
 - a. coordinates the work of the circle and has a clear and full understanding of a circle's work, and thus is responsible for ensuring the circle meets its aims,
 - b. collaborates with the Secretary and Facilitator to define circle meeting agendas,
 - c. is selected by a parent circle and consented to by the sub circle, (or alternately may be selected by the sub circle followed by the consent of the parent circle),
 - d. ensures the strong flow of information from the parent circle by serving as a link to the sub circle and serving as a full member of both circles.
- Second Link - The second link is selected by the sub circle and consented to by the parent circle. They carry the concerns and needs of their circle to the parent circle.

- Facilitator - conducts the circle meetings, manages time, ensures mutual understanding, and leads the consent processes. The facilitator supports agenda development.
- Secretary - is the steward of the past, and is responsible for ensuring that meeting notes and circle records are available to the whole community. The secretary tracks policy review dates and the backlog of unresolved issues bringing items to the agenda.
- Operational Roles - A circle may create roles specific to its domain that will vary in each circle, where an individual or team works semi-autonomously. They report and bring questions to the circle. These individuals may be, but need not be members of the circle. A common example is our system of DOTs.

Removing Members from a Circle

Circles are encouraged to follow our conflict transformation agreements. A circle member may propose to remove a member that undermines the aims of the circle or does not follow the circle member's responsibilities (see "Circle Roles" above). The member in question does not participate in that consent round. This authority should be used very carefully following deliberate attempts at conflict transformation.

VIII. Decision Making

We value making timely decisions, and balancing inclusion and effectiveness. We value the time and energy of each individual. We prefer to not decide by majority rule, nor by waiting for some to get weary and give in, or by encouraging a persistent outlier point of view that leads to indecision and decision fatigue. We endeavor to find proposals that are "good enough for now and safe enough to try" and learn from experience.

For expediency and ease for all, Circles act for the benefit of the whole community while maintaining procedures for inclusion and utilizing their best thinking. We want great ideas to be acted on with the enthusiasm of their birth and not be unnecessarily burdened with days or months of delay. At the same time, we want everyone to be empowered to question decisions that affect them.

Not all decisions are the concern of community governance. We expect members will:

1. Make decisions about the inside of their units and limited common areas (as described in the Condo Declaration).
2. Attend to emergencies or take simple and direct stewardship actions such as resolving garbage issues or minor repair problems, followed by email notification to the community.

Initiating Change

Community Members who have an idea or a concern are encouraged to contact the relevant circle coordinator or the Coordination Circle.

A Circle may:

- Collect more information
- Add it to their backlog

- Send it to another circle
- Develop a proposal
- Create a helping circle

Co-Creating A Proposal

We use a proposal development process proposed by Sociocracy For All See: [Meeting Facilitation and Decision Making Sheet | Sociocracy For All](#)

This generally includes three steps in proposal development:

1. Understand - Clarify the tensions and context surrounding a concern. Synthesize into a needs statement.
2. Explore - Brainstorm the dimensions, considerations, intentions, and alternate proposal ideas.
3. Finalize Proposal - Synthesize findings into a proposal and agree by consent that it's ready for the consent process.

Consent To A Proposal

We use a consent process proposed by Sociocracy For All. Concerns and objections are considered opportunities to improve a proposal and are listened to with respectful attention.

1. Understand - Proposal is restated and ensure that everyone understands the proposal.
2. Explore - How are people feeling about the proposal at this point?
3. Decide - Circle members are asked to offer their consent or objection to the proposal.
 - To Consent means that the proposal is good enough for now and safe enough to try. It may not be your preference but is within your range tolerance.
 - To Object means that you understand the proposal to not be in the best interest of the community or circle and their aims.

The ultimate expectation is that all members of a circle fully understand the details and implications of a proposal, and would explicitly give verbal consent to the implementation of that proposal. We strongly discourage decisions where members of a circle abstain from giving consent as a way of avoiding responsibility for a circle decision. This requires that we each develop the flexibility to support an experiment where we have concerns and evaluate the results.

Integrating Objections

Objections are received as a gift recognizing that objections are offered in support of the aim. When integrating objections, the circle should understand objections, explore options and consider how to modify the proposal.

Proposal development continues until all circle members can consent to a proposal, even if the proposal ultimately becomes a short-term experiment for the sake of just trying something. Objections are reserved for when a person presents a reasoned opinion that the decision undermines the aims of a circle or the community. Objections are not for the presentation of preferences.

Remember to celebrate decisions, particularly where consent is difficult.

A proposal includes:

- information about how it will be carried out
- any timelines
- recognition of lingering concerns
- review date.

Documenting and Sharing Decisions

A circle is responsible for logging decisions into its Circle Record. All decisions are recorded verbatim, and include a review date. Circles will announce their decisions through an email to the membership mailing list, with the word "DECISION" in all caps in the subject line and the specific wording of each decision in the body of text.

Reviewing New and Old Decisions

A circle is asked to discern if a decision is consequential or controversial enough to warrant All-Community review. If so, the preferred method is to bring the decision to an All-Community Meeting with information provided in advance. If the issue is urgent and requires immediate action then the circle may email a "DECISION with 10 days until final."

10 Day Decision: When a circle decides a 10-day All-Community review is warranted, such decisions will only be enacted after a 10-day waiting period starting on the date of email notification which specifies "DECISION with 10 days until final". The deciding circle collects and records all concerns and the results of their discussions with the concerned person(s) to be emailed to the whole community with their final decision.

Three Person Decision Review: Review of any previously made decision can be initiated by any three adults coming from three different households, with rental units considered separate households. These three persons bring their concern to Coordination Circle to be added to an All-Community meeting agenda.

Reversion to Bylaws

If a concern is unresolved by the circle within its domain and is not resolved by its parent circle, and is unresolved at an All-Community Meeting, then the concern may be resolved through a reversion to a corporate decision based on State Law, the Condo Declaration and Bylaws. Such a decision must occur in a manner and forum consistent with those authorities, which presently includes voting by one vote per unit. If members in a unit do not agree their vote will not be counted.

IX. Reviewing Governance

The Mission Circle is specifically responsible for tending to our governance and bringing governance proposals to the Coordination Circle or All-Community Meetings. All circles are expected to seek feedback from community members and improve their practices. Circles should ask the community for feedback as part of their evaluations.

We aim to make decisions that are “good enough for now, and safe enough to try” and then learn from those decisions. Therefore all agreements include a review date, tracked by each circle’s Secretary. At the review date, we ask “How effective has this policy been in supporting a circle’s or the community’s aims?” This review process includes the review of assigned roles, which are also agreements.

We might ask the following questions when evaluating circles and roles:

1. Are we effective in getting work done?
2. Are we efficient in getting work done; where do we waste effort?
3. Are our meeting records clear and accessible to all members?
4. In retrospect, how do we feel about our more difficult decisions?
5. Do we have good relationships with our Operational Roles and related circles?

We expect that some concerns about our governance will remain as a constant source of tension and learning. We propose that we acknowledge and embrace these tensions as part of our governance review process:

1. INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND COMMUNITY FLOW - Individuals have ideas, desires, concerns and preferences. However, to act as a community by consent, individuals may also set aside their concerns in favor of letting others conduct an experiment of their own. The pressure to go along can feel oppressive. If every decision requires that each individual have all their concerns met, this creates a different kind of oppression, where decision-making is cumbersome and costly, and only people willing to endure the process will or can participate.
2. DELEGATION TO CIRCLES AND SIGNIFICANCE - At many points, a decision is taken at a level that is appropriate to its significance. Discerning the significance of a decision is a choice that circles make in service to the community. We consider the impact on members and the reversibility of the decision.
3. EFFECTIVE CIRCLES - How do we both encourage autonomy and create action in circles while encouraging accountability to the whole community? How do we encourage appropriate consultation and accountability for circles, while not creating a burdensome system of requirements?
4. THE BURDEN OF CIRCLE MEETINGS - Circle meetings create labor, but also create collective wisdom and resilience. Delegating tasks to individuals can create efficiency, but also creates fragility, particularly in an all-volunteer setting. This division between circle-determined work and delegation to roles should be considered carefully within each circle's domain.
5. INTEGRATION OF DECISION MAKING WITH LAW -

X. Attachments

Vision Statement

We are an intentional community that celebrates life by honoring the diversity, oneness, and inter-relatedness of all creation. We support each other as evolving compassionate, spiritual beings who recognize our connection to the world community. We benefit from the sharing of ideas, time, skills, tools and responsibilities. We enjoy communal time while respecting individual and family needs. We value nature, beauty, and ecologically sustainable living.

Tag Line or Goal or Mission Statement

Living **O**ur **V**alues in **C**ommunity or

Living **O**ur **V**alues **E**veryday in **C**ommunity

Values Statement

Values inform our conduct. To create a healthy and fun community we value the following:

Listen to Others and Speak our Truth

- Inclusion, Collaboration, Transparency and our Collective Wisdom
- Deal with issues promptly and directly with the persons involved
- Be patient with self and others

Active Participation in the Spirit of Generosity

- Participate In Community (meetings, fun, meals, work parties, celebrations, etc.)
- Share our gifts and receive the gifts of others
- Take initiative to co-create
- Practice gratitude and celebrate together

Respect Each Other and Ourselves

- Honor our differences
- Support Connection By Acting With Honesty And Kindness
- Take responsibility for our actions, including non-actions and words
- Willingness To Work Through Conflict
- Respect The Need For Privacy
- Openness To The Possibility Of Being Changed

Stewardship

- Tending & upkeep of our common resources and those that belong to individuals
- Work to reduce our impact on the environment, in service to the future of our planet.
- Take financial responsibility for home and shared property
- Maintain our nest: private homes, shared structures, and grounds

Sociocracy Principles

1. Equivalence: no one ignored
2. Distributed leadership
3. Seek win-win solutions rather than believing that “if you get more there is less for me.”
4. Open to emergence: Acceptance of not knowing and letting go of any attachment to outcome.
5. Feedback and evaluation are the basis of learning. Work with reality not wishful thinking or expectations.
6. Decisions by few for expediency and input from many always.
7. Information flows in every direction. More information is always positive.
8. Transparency gives everyone the same access to Information and, therefore, to power.
9. Good enough for now and safe enough to try. This means to act on an idea that isn't perfect and improve it as you use it.
10. Act with intentionality to have agency and choice over what we do.
11. Tensions point to a lack of clarity of domains, roles, or someone's needs. Tensions are an invitation to explore and gain understanding. We don't want connection and creativity to be shut down by conflict avoidance or moralistic judgment (“right and wrong” thinking).

“Many Voices One Song” by Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez shares the following about how to use their book and other teaching tools:

“Sociocracy is not an all or nothing approach. Readers can use as few or many features and tools as they want and they can change their minds over time. No one owns the individual tools. People do what they do. There is no right and wrong. There are only more and less effective tools for managing and governing ourselves. In this spirit, here is what we want.

- We want readers to understand the design principles.
- We want to offer readers practical guidance on how to put the principles into practice.
- We want to empower readers to tailor the tools to their organization's needs.

We recommend taking all that seems useful, and to keep the eyes open for signs indicating that the governance method might have areas that need improvement.”

The Nonviolent Communications Approach

1. OBSERVATION: “When I observe _____...”
2. FEELING and NEED: “I FEEL _____ because I NEED _____... Or alternately follow your feeling with, ...because I value, long for, want, wish, or the most important thing to me about this is that we (state our relevant value).” For example “clean up our own stuff.”
3. REQUEST: for example: “Would you be willing to... put this on the agenda for discussion or in the backlog for later?, “Would you please put only clean cardboard that is flattened into the recycle bin?”, or “Could I have a show of hands of individuals who would like this issue dealt with soon?”