Problem Solving as Opposed to Decision Making
Decision making and problem solving are two related, but very different processes. Problem solving is a process of resolving a discrepancy between an actual state of affairs and a desired or ideal state of affairs.

Decision making is used as a critical step of problem solving involving the selection of one alternative to be implemented toward resolving the problem.

Groups may encounter many situations more complicated than problems individuals face. Some types of problem solving include:

- **Objective problem solving** works on the stated job that brought the group together.
- **Group process problem solving** develops the agreements, rules, and controls required for the group to proceed in accomplishing the task.
- **Individual growth and personal meaning problem solving** requires the individual, working through the experiences in the group, to assimilate present experiences with past experiences. The success he or she has in processing these experiences is called "individual growth," the "development of individual capacity," or "personality."
- **Subjective problem solving** works on the hidden agendas, clique relationships, and other emotional relationships that function within a group.

Seven-Step Problem-Solving Process
The problem-solving process works equally well for individuals or groups.

1. **State Problem**
   
   **Purpose**: To understand what you or the group wants to do but can't and to identify deficits.
   
   **Example**: Our organization is not effective.

2. **Define Problem**
   
   **Purpose**: To clarify and make a general deficit specific.
   
   **Method**: Ask yourself, "What does it mean that I (or we) can't do something? How will I know when the problem is solved? What can I observe that will show problem solution?"
   
   **Example**: Meetings are not well attended; our president can't run a meeting; we do not have enough publicity; we do not have rules of order. Note that you and your group can observe when meetings are better attended by counting attendance, and that the other problem solutions would be noticeable.

3. **Generate Solutions**
   
   **Purpose**: To gather information, to expand ideas and alternatives that answer the question: "How can we...?"
   
   **Methods**: Brainstorming and research, tradition, advice from students, teachers, administrators, etc.
   
   **Example**: How can we increase attendance? Make meetings mandatory; have meetings during school hours; serve refreshments during meetings; remind members of meetings, etc.
4. **Select Solutions**  
*Purpose:* To choose between alternatives by using decision-making processes.  
*Methods:*  
a. **Individual Decision:** To make a quick choice, especially when added information is unavailable or unnecessary.  
b. **Group Decision:** To make a choice based on the input of others; encourage others to participate in the decision-making process.  
c. **Values Clarification:** To choose between alternatives based on what is most important to those making the decision.  
*Examples:*  
a. Individual: The president, committee chairperson, or another person decides on the course of action.  
b. Group: This type of solution selection is accomplished by a group vote or a group consensus.  
c. Values Clarification: By using a worksheet, quantify those elements most important to the group in making a selection between alternatives.

5. **Develop Program**  
*Purpose:* To develop a step-by-step process to work toward accomplishing the selected solution.  
*Methods:* Examine the Program Development Worksheet as one possible model of program development. Time lines for the accomplishment of a task are also an example of a method of program development.  
*Example:* See the example outlined on the sample Program Development Worksheet.

6. **Implement Program**  
*Purpose:* To take action and complete the program developed. Methods: Follow the worksheet, timeline, or whatever method of program development you have chosen.  
*Example:* Program implementation is doing what you proposed to do. Using the example of how to increase attendance at meetings, making meetings mandatory would be an implementation.

7. **Evaluation**  
*Purpose:* To examine the entire process to uncover what went well and what needed improvement. Evaluation can be formative and work toward program improvement during implementation, or it can be summative and work toward making future programs more effective.

**Problem-Solving Process Summary**  
> Identify the actual state of affairs  
> Define the desired state of affairs  
> Gather information  
> Determine criteria for basing decision  
> Generate alternatives  
> Decide (decision-making part of process) on alternatives  
> Plan how to put your solution into action  
> Implement your solution
Evaluate the results.

CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Once you have selected the solution to your problem, the next step is implementation. At this point you must move from the theoretical to the practical world. To help you through the planning and implementation process, here is a "Rampla"—Spanish for ramp. Keep these points in mind as you move into action.

Roadblocks
> What problems might arise for that I should be prepared?
> Is there a back-up plan that I could use if the original idea fails? Acceptance
> In what ways can I gain acceptance of the idea?
> Who are the most important people I need to convince?
> Who are the key people who might help lobby for the idea?
> What are the advantages to others of accepting the idea?
> What objections can I foresee others having? In what ways can I overcome these objections?

Mechanical Adjustments
> What time would be best for putting the idea into practice?
> Prepare a list of deadlines that should be met if the solution is to be effectively implemented.

Precautions
> How can I pre-test the idea?
> Have I consulted all the people who will be affected or interested in the solution?

Location
> Where are the best places for putting the idea into practice?
> How can I modify the available location?

Assistance
> How can others be of help?
> What do I need others to do?
> Who are the specific individuals who might be useful?
> How can I show my appreciation to those who assist me, encouraging their future support?

BLOCKS TO CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING
> Barriers in perception; badmouthing others' ideas
> Lack of self-confidence, information, energy, effort, humor, positive outlook, rewards for innovative behavior
> Old ways of doing things (force of habit); overlooking the obvious
> Conformity, clock pressure, close-mindedness, cutting down ideas
> Killer statements, keeping a closed mind
> Self-imposed boundaries, fear of being wrong or laughed at, self-complacency, subservience to authority.