



## Tips for Facilitating Effective Discussion

**GET WITH THE  
GUIDELINES<sup>SM</sup>**

**CORONARY  
ARTERY  
DISEASE**

**GET WITH THE  
GUIDELINES<sup>SM</sup>**

**STROKE**

**GET WITH THE  
GUIDELINES<sup>SM</sup>**

**HEART  
FAILURE**

## **Introduction – Facilitator’s Overview**

Thank you for your interest in improving the care of patients in your community by becoming a champion in your hospital for guideline implementation and quality of care in your facility.

**Get With The Guidelines** helps hospital teams implement the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Prevention Guidelines. Get With The Guidelines is designed to improve risk factor management in the secondary prevention of stroke by training healthcare professionals throughout the United States.

As you lead your team through the meetings involved in implementing Get With The Guidelines, you have a pivotal role in ensuring that participants leave the session with a refinement plan that they feel they “own” and are committed to implementing in their institution. Effective facilitation of these meetings can help your team build consensus and create action plans to effect positive change in your institution.

Some things you can do to help build ownership and commitment during the session include:

- Create a climate in which participants get to know and feel comfortable with each other.
- Encourage participants to actively contribute their opinions and ideas.
- Support participants in developing their own solutions rather than prescribing solutions for them.
- Make sure that all participants actively contribute, and that the discussion isn’t dominated by a few.
- Keep the discussions on track to achieve the meeting’s purpose.
- Step back as discussion leader when participants begin to “own” the process and start facilitating their own discussions.
- Ensure that your team has a realistic, well-reasoned implementation plan that they are proud of and excited about.

## **Tips for Facilitating Effective Discussion**

### **Four Ingredients in a Successful Meeting**

There must be:

- A common focus on the content (purpose).
- A common focus on the process (how we will go about this).
- Someone responsible for maintaining an open and balanced flow of ideas and suggestions among all attendees.
- Someone responsible for keeping attendees’ contributions from being prematurely evaluated or attacked.

### **Role of a Facilitator**

- Maintain a neutral role — prompt others in the meeting to discuss their ideas and suggestions.
- Maintain a balanced flow of ideas among the attendees — don’t let a few attendees dominate the discussion.
- Ensure that everyone participates.

- Keep the discussion focused on the topic at hand.
- Provide the group with processes that help balance and focus the discussion.
- Summarize points of agreement and agreed-upon next steps.

### **Understanding Your Audience**

Use these questions to consider the needs and concerns of your team:

- Are all meeting participants directly interested in the topic or involved in carrying out results? If not, should they be involved in the meeting?
- Are there other ways to keep people with a “need to know” informed — telephone, memos, and personal meetings?
- How familiar is each person with the topic?
- What information do you need to provide to ensure full understanding?
- What degree of interest, “buy-in” or resistance do members of the audience have in the topic?
- What data, information or other form of influence do you need to increase “buy-in” or decrease resistance?
- What terms or concepts, if any, will need to be explained?

### **Encouraging Participation in Meetings**

- Review the discussion objective(s) at the start of the session to orient participants to the nature of the discussion.
- Establish a ground rule at the start of the session that everyone participates — that it’s important to hear everyone’s ideas and opinions.
- Don’t offer opinions yourself; instead, draw out participants’ ideas and thoughts.
- Ask participants who are not contributing for their thoughts or opinions (e.g., “Dr. \_\_\_\_, what do you think about this?”).
- Ask people who have not contributed to play “devil’s advocate” for an idea that’s been presented.
- Acknowledge contributions by thanking the person or by indicating in other ways that the contribution is helpful (e.g., “Very interesting...” or “That should improve the...” or “That’s a new way of looking at the problem”).
- Encourage people to generate new ideas or approaches.
- Encourage a healthy discussion of ideas.
- Accept opposing points of view.
- Assign individuals to summarize key discussion points at the end of the session.

### **A Process for Helping a Group To Prioritize**

Use this technique to help a group clarify the relative importance or impact of ideas presented.

This is also a way to obtain consensus among a group.

- Post these definitions of priority on a flip chart:
  - 1 = most importance or impact
  - 2 = medium importance or impact
  - 3 = low importance or impact
- Review the definitions with participants and ask them to assign a priority to the ideas under discussion.
- Either ask for a show of hands and count the number of “1’s,” “2’s,” and “3’s” for each suggestion (to obtain a general consensus on priorities); or survey the group visually, looking for verbal and non-verbal signs of agreement or disagreement.

### **Moving Toward Consensus**

To keep the discussion focused, identify areas of general agreement first and leave topics on which there are differences to the next discussion. Here is an example:

- After the group has identified several suggestions (e.g., for target population), poll the group for consensus for priority. (See above for tips on prioritization)
- Mark each item of general agreement with an identifying symbol (check mark).
- When you reach an item on which there is a substantial difference of opinion, say something like: “We’ll discuss this one in a few minutes since there seems to be a difference of opinion.”
- When you have reviewed all items on the list, return to the items on which there were differences of opinion.

### **Moving Toward Resolving Differences**

To focus discussion on a topic on which there are different opinions, it’s helpful to structure it around pros (reasons the item should be included) and cons (reasons the items should not be included).

Post a flip chart similar to the design below:

- Pros = Reasons To Include; Cons = Reasons Not To Include

Refer to the flip chart, saying something like: “Let’s think of items on which there are different opinions.” Then review the definitions of pros and cons. Keep the flip chart visible throughout the discussion.

If the differences of opinion are strong...

- Record the group’s responses on the flip chart so everyone can see the differences of opinion.
- Ask attendees to assign a priority to each “Pro” and “Con.” (See above for tips on prioritization)

### **Handling Distracting Behaviors**

- Rambling discussions — Return to the discussion objective(s) and ask for cooperation in achieving them or ask how the person’s comments relate to the topic at hand.
- Off-the-point comments or discussions — Indicate that the person’s comment is interesting and that there may be others in the group who would like to discuss it on a break. Then return to the topic at hand.
- Raising topics that will be covered later — Mention that there will be full opportunity to discuss this topic in another session (indicate when).
- One or a few dominating discussion — Keep participants from dominating the discussion by directing questions to others (e.g., “Dr. \_\_\_\_, what do you think about this issue?” or “Dr. \_\_\_\_, what has been your experience?”).
- Latecomers — Don’t stop the meeting to “catch them up.” If you are referring to handouts, ask latecomers to look on with someone else and give them a copy at a break.
- Arguments or clashes — Restate the essence of each person’s point of view. If appropriate, state that the difference cannot be resolved here and that you need to move on with the agenda. If the atmosphere has become tense, call for a short break.
- Side conversations — Pause without looking directly at those talking. If the conversation continues, ask if they have a question or issue to share with the group.