

Consumer Engagement in a Multi-Stakeholder Group

The premise of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) project is that no single person, group, or profession can improve health and health care throughout a community without the support of others. Therefore, AF4Q asks key stakeholders—health care providers, employers, health plans, and consumers—to work together to achieve better care in their communities.

The consumer advocate perspective is critically important in this multi-stakeholder Alliance because consumers represent both the target audience and a “game changing” force for the Alliance. In other words, the consumer is the target audience of the information that the Alliance is developing, **AND** their perspective can advance the agenda of the multi-stakeholder group by making it more reflective of patients’ needs.

The following tips and recommendations will help maximize the engagement of consumer advocates in your multi-stakeholder group*.

Keep in Mind:

- Historically, the drivers of health care quality improvement efforts have been health care providers, employers, researchers, and health plans; the end-users— consumers—have been largely absent. Often, as a result, initiatives aimed at improving health care quality fail to reflect the perspectives of patients and families.
- Many consumer advocates are aware of America’s health care quality problems and understand the links between cost, access, equity, and quality. They are, therefore, a powerful force in engaging the public, as well as creating materials and products that are meaningful to the general public.
- While everyone is a consumer of health care, it is not appropriate for all stakeholders to represent the consumer perspective. Unlike other stakeholders, consumers do not have a financial stake in the health care system in that their livelihoods don’t come from the health care system. It is important to ensure that there is “true” consumer representation in multi-stakeholder groups that address health care quality.

Effective Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

It is critical that a multi-stakeholder group adopt a decision-making process that allows for input from all stakeholders and that moves a diverse group from planning to action. There are a variety of methods for accomplishing multi-stakeholder engagement; the process you implement may be as simple as asking for a “yay” or “nay” vote on Alliance activities, deliverables, and future direction. Or, you might choose to adopt *Robert’s Rules of Order*ⁱ— a set of meeting and committee rules intended for use by deliberative bodies— as a way of ensuring that all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute equally. You might also decide to use *Proposal-Based Decision Making*ⁱⁱ (see sample at end of document), a process

recommended by researchers from the University of Maryland. While the decision-making method will vary by Alliance, a formal process that encourages the input and involvement of all stakeholders and provides a means for them to do so will enhance collaboration within your Alliance and ensure that your efforts reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders.

Effective Multi-Stakeholder Relationship Tips



- Every stakeholder's perspective is important to the group; all stakeholders should be prepared to actively participate in all meetings and projects.
- Try to distribute project background materials, meeting agendas and other relevant resources in advance of any discussions; consider offering one-on-one assistance to the consumer representative to help them prepare for group discussions.
- All members should be addressed in the same manner, i.e., by first name; this will help eliminate any perceived hierarchical issues among stakeholders.
- Make sure that all stakeholders have been introduced and are aware of each other's expertise and background. If anyone's presence is likely to intimidate other stakeholders, put them at ease by explaining the reason the person is participating.
- Be aware of and reduce the use of medical terminology and acronyms; create a guide or glossary of common terms that can be shared with all stakeholders.
- Give all stakeholders an opportunity to contribute, and if someone isn't participating, offer them specific opportunities to get involved in the discussion. In doing so, try not to let people feel put on the spot.
- Stakeholders may share information that is both private and confidential. The confidentiality of personal and organizational information shared during any group discussion should be respected.

Effective Meetings Tips

- Avoid interruptions; put telephones on "do not disturb" and turn off mobile phones or set to vibrate.
- All stakeholders should be responsible for keeping the group on track. Consider the use of a "parking lot" to return to ideas that are outside the immediate discussion.
- Meetings should begin and end on time, so participants should be asked to plan schedules accordingly.
- Use good brainstorming practices; specifically, don't criticize suggestions when in idea-generating mode.
- Stakeholders should practice active listening when other participants are expressing their opinions. Avoid interrupting others or engaging in side conversations.

SAMPLE DECISION-MAKING METHOD

Proposal-Based Decision Making Process

Make a proposal	Add to or propose new	Show thumbs 	Build support	Thumbs up! 	Commit to action
<i>I propose that ...</i>	<i>Do you want to add? Make a new proposal?</i>	<i>Where are you? Support? Don't support? Not sure?</i>	<i>What will bring your thumb up?</i>	<i>Proposal adopted!</i>	<i>Who will do what when?</i>

1. Make a proposal

Take an idea of what you want and use proposal language to make a proposal. Use a calm, constructive tone.

2. Add to or propose new

Explore whether people want to add to your proposal or make new proposals. Consider the proposals as different options or possible decisions the group might make.

3. See where people are – use a show of thumbs

Ask people to show where they are by a show of thumbs. Do they support a proposal (thumb up), are they not sure (thumb sideways), or do they not support (thumb down)?

4. Build proposals everyone can support

Ask people whose thumbs are sideways or down (not sure or don't agree) "what will bring their thumb up"? Listen to their issues and encourage proposals to address the issues. Invite everyone to make proposals that everyone can support, ask people to do the work of finding convergence.

5. All thumbs up! Decision made

A proposal is adopted and becomes a decision when every one's "thumb is up"; or, when almost everyone's "thumb is up" and the group decides they have enough support to move forward because the people whose "thumb is not up" are okay with the group going forward.

6. Commit to Action

The group moves to action by deciding who will do what— and when to implement the decision.

*For a complementary factsheet that can be shared directly with your Alliance's consumer advocate representatives, visit www.nationalpartnership.org and view the *Consumer Advocate Best Practices* factsheet housed in the Quality Care Now Consumer Engagement Toolbox.

ⁱ The Official Robert's Rules of Order website: www.robertsrules.com/

ⁱⁱ Pillsbury, Jolie Bain. "Proposal Based Decision Making: A Results Based Leadership Application": www.rbl-apps.com/index.php