

# Consumer Engagement in a Multi-Stakeholder Group

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It is critically important to include consumer perspectives in multi-stakeholder health care quality improvement initiatives. Consumers are the target audience for the information being developed and a game changing force. Their perspectives can advance the goals of the multi-stakeholder group by ensuring they reflect the needs of patients, families and the local community.

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

## To Keep in Mind

- ▶ The drivers of health care quality improvement efforts have historically been health care providers, employers, researchers, and health plans. Consumers, who are the end-users, have been largely absent. As a result, initiatives to improve health care quality often fail to reflect the perspectives of patients and families.
- ▶ Consumer advocates are often aware of our health care quality problems and understand the links between cost, access, equity, and quality. They are a powerful force in engaging the public and disseminating meaningful information to consumers.
- ▶ It is not appropriate for other stakeholders, such as hospital administrators or employers, to represent consumer perspectives. Unlike other stakeholders, consumers do not depend on the health care system for their livelihoods. It is important to ensure that there is true consumer representation in multi-stakeholder groups that address health care quality.

## Effective Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

- ▶ A multi-stakeholder group must adopt a decision-making process that allows input from all stakeholders and moves a diverse group from planning to action. There are a variety of methods for accomplishing multi-stakeholder engagement; the process may be as simple as asking for up-or-down votes, deliverables, or future direction. *Robert's Rules of Order*<sup>1</sup>, a set of meeting and committee rules intended for use by deliberative bodies, may also be adopted to help ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute. *Proposal-Based Decision Making*<sup>2</sup> (see sample), a process recommended by researchers at the University of Maryland, encourages the involvement of all stakeholders and provides a means for them to contribute their

input. *Proposal-Based Decision Making* will enhance collaboration and ensure that an initiative reflects the perspectives of all stakeholders.

## Effective Multi-Stakeholder Relationship Tips

- ▶ Each stakeholder's perspective is important to the group; all stakeholders should be prepared to actively participate in all meetings and projects.
- ▶ Distribute project background materials, meeting agendas and other relevant resources in advance of all discussions; consider offering one-on-one assistance to the consumer representatives to help them prepare.
- ▶ All members should be addressed in the same manner, i.e., by first name; this will help eliminate perceived hierarchical issues among stakeholders.
- ▶ Make sure that all stakeholders have been introduced to each other and are aware of other members' expertise and backgrounds. If anyone's presence could intimidate other stakeholders, explain the reason the person is participating.
- ▶ Reduce the use of medical terminology and acronyms; create a glossary of commonly used terms to share with all stakeholders.
- ▶ Ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute. If someone isn't participating in discussions, offer them specific opportunities to get involved, without putting pressure on them.
- ▶ Stakeholders may share confidential information. Members should respect the confidentiality of personal and organizational information.

## Effective Meetings Tips

- ▶ All stakeholders should be responsible for keeping the group on track. Consider the use of a "parking lot" to collect a comprehensive list ideas that are worthy of future discussion but off-topic for this one.
- ▶ Meetings should begin and end on time to be respectful of participants' time.
- ▶ Use good brainstorming practices; specifically, don't criticize suggestions put forward in idea-generating mode.
- ▶ Stakeholders should practice active listening when other participants are expressing their opinions. Avoid interrupting or engaging others in conversations.

## Proposal-Based Decision Making Process

### **Make a proposal.**

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

**Add to the proposal being considered or put forward a new proposal.**

- ▶ 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.

**Access what people think of the proposals under consideration.**

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

**Build proposals everyone can support.**

- ▶ Ask members who are not sure or don't agree what it would take to change their opinion. Listen to their issues and encourage proposals to address them. Invite members to make proposals that everyone can support. Ask them to work to find consensus.

**Make a decision.**

- ▶ A proposal is adopted and becomes a decision when all members' thumbs are up, or when the group decides it has enough support to move forward because members whose thumbs are not up do not object to the group moving forward.

**Commit to Action.**

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

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1 The Official Robert's Rules of Order website: [www.robertsrules.com/](http://www.robertsrules.com/)

2 Pillsbury, Jolie Bain. "Proposal Based Decision Making: A Results Based Leadership Application": [www.rbl-apps.com/index.php](http://www.rbl-apps.com/index.php)