



SMP Modified Consultancy Protocol

Developed by the Southern Maine Partnership from the Consultancy Protocol by Gene Thompson Grove

1. Initial Presentation (5 minutes)

Presentation team members present a quick overview (with or without handouts) of the matter they have chosen and frame 1-3 questions regarding problems or dilemmas that they want the response group to address.

2. Clarifying Questions (5 minutes)

Response group members ask questions of the presenters that have factual answers of a phrase or two in length. They ask the presenters “who, what, where, when and how much” questions. Clarifying Questions do not include “why?” or “what other approaches have you considered?” questions. The purpose of clarifying questions is to help the questioner better understand the presenters’ situation and their handouts (if any have been distributed); these questions are not likely to offer any “food for thought” to the presenters. **Clarifying Questions may also be asked during any later section of this protocol if necessary.**

4. Probing Questions (5 minutes)

Response group members ask questions of the presenters that help the presenters clarify and extend their own thinking about the matter they have presented to the group. The group asks open-ended questions such as:

- why...?
- what other approaches have you considered regarding...?”
- what do you think would happen if...?

Answers to probing questions are usually longer than answers to clarifying questions. The presenters may need to think for a few moments before responding. Presenters may choose to not respond - other than to say that they may need to think more about the question.

5. Non-presenter Discussion (10 minutes)

The response group talks with each other while the presenters listen and take notes; the presenters are not allowed to speak at this time (except to answer a clarifying question if one arises). It’s usually helpful for the presenters to move their chairs back slightly away from the group where they can more easily attend to listening and note taking without feeling the need to give eye contact or any other kind of response to the speakers. The response group refers to the presenters in the third person in order to help maintain this separation throughout this section. This often feels awkward but it is only for a few minutes and the benefits can be substantial. Response group members may offer their analyses of the situation and possible, never definitive, ideas about solutions. They may characterize their comments as “warm” or “cool” feedback. Cool feedback is often best received if it comes after some “warm” feedback and if it is expressed in the form of a question or with some qualification and a measure of humility, e.g. “I wonder if...” rather than “I think he should...” It is also important for the presenters to listen carefully and in a non-defensive manner.

6. Presenter Response into Open Discussion (10 minutes)

The presenters respond to what the response group members said in the previous section. The purpose of this section is *not* for the presenters to respond to everything the response group members said. Instead, the purpose is for the presenters to talk about what they heard that was most important to them, and any thoughts or questions that were stimulated by the group discussion. Once the presenters have responded to their own satisfaction and wish to engage in a more free-flowing dialogue, they indicate so to the group by *explicitly* saying that they are ready to discuss additional comments, ideas and questions.

7. Reflection/Debrief (5 minutes)

The presenters begin this section as well. It's important to give all participants a chance to discuss their observations of and feelings about the process. Often hearing others talk about how the process worked for them helps people see the value of using a structured protocol.