



FRAMING AN ISSUE FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION

Laying the foundation for effective collaboration

*The leader of the past knows how to answer. The leader of the future will know how to ask.
--Peter Drucker*

Productive team discussions require sharing of diverse perspectives and critical thinking. This involves thoughtful preparation and skillful engagement. The format below can be used to plan for a significant group discussion or work through a challenge together. As you experiment with the format, you can revise it to fit your situation.

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION: Answer these questions before you initiate the group discussion:

What is the issue?

Be concise. In one or two sentences, describe the issue. Is it a concern, challenge, opportunity, or recurring problem that is becoming more troublesome?

Why is it significant?

What's at stake? How does this affect you, others, services, customers, interactions, pending issues, or other relevant factors? What are the implications or future impact if this issue is not resolved?

What outcomes are you looking for?

What would success look like? (e.g. problem resolution, alternative scenarios, identification of consequences, critique of the current plan)

What is the Relevant Background Information?

Summarize significant information that led to the current situation.

Consider the following: how, when, why, and where did the issue start? Who are the key players? What has been done up to now? What have you learned so far?

What is your Current Assessment of the Situation?

What is going on now? What stops you from having the results you want now? What options are you considering?

Who should be included?

Given the situation and the desired outcomes, identify the people you will invite to the discussion. Ensure a diversity of perspectives.

PREPARE THE GROUP:

- Send a written description of the situation, desired outcomes, and relevant background information.
- Define questions you would like group members to consider before the meeting. This gives them time to think and come prepared to engage in a thoughtful dialogue.
- Encourage participants to come with a sense of curiosity so they can stay open and fully explore options.

FACILITATE THE DISCUSSION:

- Reiterate the outcomes you want from the group discussion and how you will structure and facilitate the meeting.
- Encourage participation by inviting everyone to share his or her perspectives. State that differing perspectives and differences of opinion are welcome.
- After orienting people to the issue at hand, allow time for clarifying questions to ensure everyone has the information he or she needs to begin the discussion.
- Solicit ideas, comments, perspectives and/or solutions from everyone.
- (optional) Prior to the end of the meeting, ask each person to offer a one-sentence response to the following question: What would you do or recommend given what you now know?
- At the end of the discussion, summarize the following:
 - o *What I heard*
 - o *My next steps...the actions I am committed to taking and when I will take them*
 - o *Other agreements made by the group*
 - o *How you or other group members will keep each other informed.*

HARD WON WISDOM – WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

- Effective planning is essential and is the key for an effective discussion.
- When planning for your upcoming discussion, carefully define the questions you will bring to the group. Focus your questions on the future and on what we want to create, not on what is broken and needs fixing.
- Encourage and embrace diversity of opinion. Good decisions are based on robust group discussions.