

Consultancy Protocol (Continued)

Some Tips for Consultancies

Step 1: The success of the consultancy often depends on the quality of the presenter's reflection in Step 1, as well as on the quality and authenticity of the question framed for the consultancy group. However, it is not uncommon for a presenter, at the end of a consultancy, to say, "Now I know what my real question is." That is fine, too. It is sometimes helpful for the presenter to prepare ahead of time a brief (1-2 page) written description of the issues for the consultancy group to read as part of step 1.

Steps 2 & 3: Clarifying questions are for the person asking them. They ask the presenter "Who, what, where, when and how." These are not "why" questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or two.

Probing questions are for the person answering them. They ask the presenter "why" (among other things), and are open-ended. They take longer to answer, and often require deep thought on the part of the presenter before she/he speaks.

Step 4: When the group talks while the presenter listens, it is helpful for the presenter to pull her/his chair back slightly away from the group. This protocol requires the consultancy group to talk about the presenter in the third person, almost as if she/he is not there. As awkward as this may feel at first, it often opens up a rich conversation. Remember that it is the group's job to offer an analysis of the issue or question presented. It is not necessary to solve the problem or to offer a definitive answer.

It is important for the presenter to listen in a non-defensive manner. Listen for new ideas, perspectives, and approaches. Listen to the group's analysis of your question/issues. Listen for assumptions—both your own and the group's—implicit in the conversation. Don't listen for judgment of you by the group. This is not supposed to be about you, but about a question you have raised. Remember that you asked the group to help you with this question or issue.

Step 5: The point of this time period is not for the presenter to give a "blow by blow" response to the group's conversation, nor is it to defend or further explain herself. Rather, this is a time for the presenter to talk about what were, for her, the most significant comments, ideas and questions she/he heard. The presenter can also share any new thoughts or questions she/he had while listening to the consultancy group.

Step 6: Debriefing the process is key. Don't short change this step.