

Using the Structured Reflective Conversation Planning Tool¹

AIMS: What are the desired rational goal & experiential impact of the conversation?

Aims describe the purpose for a focused conversation, and aims should be established prior to planning—but explained to the group *after the introduction*.

Rational aim: The *rational aim* is the practical goal—the concrete objectives—of the conversation. Examples include clarifying a misunderstanding, solving a specific problem, or gleaning lessons from past work.

Experiential aim: The experiential aim is the inner impact that you want the conversation to have. Examples include re-establishing a team’s confidence, addressing hurt feelings or misunderstandings, or increasing motivation about a new strategy.

INTRODUCTION: Establish purpose, expectations, norms, & desired outcomes

2–3 minutes

Purpose: Establish the meeting’s purpose, expectations, norms, and desired outcomes.

Steps: Begin the conversation with this section.

WHAT? Objective questions: What do you see / know?

3–5 minutes

Purpose: To give participants a chance to surface relevant facts about an issue or to examine data.

Steps:

- Select question prompts from the list below.
- Ask the first question and have several participants respond.
- Use a different question prompt after every 2 to 3 responses, to minimize redundancy.
- Make sure each participant responds to at least one of the question prompts.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

Question prompts:

- What is one fact you noticed?
- What is one thing that stands out / catches your attention?
- What are some successes / challenges?
- What clarification is needed?

GUT? Reflective questions: What do you think, & how do you feel?

3–5 minutes

Purpose: To allow participants to share their personal responses about the issue or data.

Steps:

- Select question prompts from the list below.
- It is not necessary for each participant to respond to every—or even *any*—of these questions.
- Relate responses to the topic or data by restating or paraphrasing when needed.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

Question prompts:

- What surprises you / pleases you / gives you confidence / makes you proud?
- What concerns you / worries you?
- What seems important or unclear?

¹ This resource was adapted from content in Nelson, J. (2007). *The art of focused conversation for schools: Over 100 ways to guide clear thinking and promote learning*. Toronto, Ontario: The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA Canada).

SO WHAT? Interpretive questions: What does this mean, & what are the implications?**20 minutes**

Purpose: To solicit reflection and determine the importance of the issue or data.

Steps:

- Anticipate issues that you think the group might identify.
- Select 2 to 3 question prompts from the list below.
- It is not necessary for each participant to respond to every—or even *any*—of these questions.
- Change questions as needed, to minimize redundancy.
- Divide participants into small groups to discuss issues raised and to enable subgroups to share thinking.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

Question prompts:

- What seems to be the central issue?
- What seems to be most challenging / most critical?
- What questions are raised?
- What insights / patterns / themes are emerging?
- What does this mean for our team / group / department?

NOW WHAT? Decisional questions: What do we do now?**10 minutes**

Purpose: To identify a specific action plan that the group can implement immediately.

Steps:

- Use question prompts to facilitate a discussion in which the group selects, develops, and commits to a set of ideas from the *So what?* discussion above.
- Document the decisions of the group, ensuring that the following criteria are addressed:
 - Actions are specific, measurable, immediate, and directly related to the issue or data.
 - Actions describe *who* is responsible for *what* and by *when*.
 - A method is determined for collecting evidence of success and for monitoring progress.
 - A timeline is established, and a follow-up discussion is planned.

Question prompts:

- On what immediate actions can we all agree?
- What is an appropriate starting point?
- What supports are needed in order for us to take action?
- When will we start?
- Who will do what, and when?
- What exactly are our next steps?
- How will we know / measure progress?

CLOSING: Important points to remember & record**2–3 minutes**

Purpose: To confirm actions and expectations, reiterate important ideas, and confirm a timeline for follow-up.

Steps:

- Thank group members for participation and summarize the importance of actions and their expected effects.
- Reiterate timeline, and confirm roles and responsibilities.

Structured Reflective Conversation Planning Tool

INTRODUCTION: Establish purpose, expectations, norms, & desired outcomes **2–3 minutes**

AIMS: What are the desired rational goal & experiential impact of the conversation? **2–3 minutes**

Rational aim—concrete goal / objectives:

Experiential aim—intended experiential impact:

WHAT? Objective questions: What do you see / know? **3–5 minutes**
Surface relevant facts & information.

GUT? Reflective questions: What do you think, & how do you feel? **3–5 minutes**
Elicit feelings, reactions, & associations.

SO WHAT? Interpretive questions: What does this mean, & what are the implications? **20 minutes**
Uncover meaning, significance, & implications.

NOW WHAT? Decisional questions: What do we do now? **10 minutes**
Plan future action, direction, & next steps.

CLOSING: Important points to remember & record **2–3 minutes**