Stages of Discussion

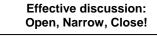


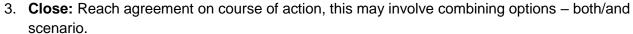
Why use stages of discussion?

Understanding stages of discussion will help your group processes and work be more effective and move towards decision-making.

What are the stages of a discussion?

- Open: Clearly defines the meeting purpose. This is the time to gather input and suggestions from participants – an open discussion. All ideas are good at this point, so don't try and analyze what someone has said – that comes later.
- 2. **Narrow:** Focusing ideas into parts that are more manageable and seeing if they meet the purpose.





1. How to 'Open' the discussion

- 1. State the purpose. "We are here to find a solution for...", "We are here to decide how to ..." any statement that will get the discussion started.
- **2.** How to proceed. "Let's come up with 4 or 5 potential actions that will..." -an idea that will set the course of action establish a set time for this.
- **3. Brainstorm.** "Karen will write down the ideas as you call them out" produce as many ideas as possible in a short amount of time.
- **4.** Clarify. "What do you mean by...?", "Does anyone have a question about...?" make sure everyone is clear on what is being suggested before you evaluate the ideas.

2. How to 'Narrow' the discussion

- 1. Combine or eliminate like ideas. "Can we combine X and Y as they are similar", "Can we eliminate Z as it has the potential to go beyond our contractual obligations?" narrow down the choices, ask for clarification if needed and eliminate redundancy.
- 2. **Prioritize.** "Let's each chose our top 4 and see where that takes us" lets the group see where others priorities are without having made a final decision and further narrows the choices. N/3 (number of choices divided by 3 = number of choices by participant) is a good way of establishing how many options one can vote on.
- **3.** Advocate. "Does anyone feel particularly strong about a certain option?" this can raise awareness of the details in a choice and can uncover strengths and weaknesses.

3. How to 'Close' the discussion

- **1. Negative Poll.** "Is anyone not willing to take option 4 off the list?" reaches quick agreement on an item.
- 2. Build up/eliminate. "What can we add to option A to make it more feasible?", "Can we combine elements of 2 and 3 to reach an agreement?" creates a group suggested proposal, a more widely accepted solution and can facilitate agreement between opposing parties.
- 3. Straw Poll. "We have been working hard to get to this point. Can we check in with everyone to see how they are doing? Can we proceed?" To test the level of agreement within a group and the commitment to continue.
- **4. Both/And.** "Do we need to choose between the final options? Is it possible to try both?" avoids a win/lose or either/or decision.
- **5. Make a Proposal/Agree or agree to disagree.** "It looks like we can move on option 2", "It appears that we are at a stalemate, how would the group like to proceed?" check for understanding and agreement, then the group moves forward with next steps and a solution...or not.