



# 10 Tips

## to Facilitate a Successful Overdose Fatality Review

Facilitating an overdose fatality review (OFR) team is a unique skill. Not only does it require setting aside personal opinions, but it also requires effective management of committee dynamics, personalities, and agendas.

The OFR facilitator should be an effective communicator, an active listener, and a trusted leader of the team. Being an active listener requires the facilitator to paraphrase, summarize, and reflect while also asking clarifying and probing questions in a non-critical way.

Selecting a facilitator that maintains trust of the team and can navigate difficult conversations is a key element in the success of an OFR team. Here are ten tips for successful meeting facilitation.

**1. Create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment before everyone gets to the meeting.**

It is important to think about an environment that is conducive for networking, side conversations, and welcoming new members. This can be achieved in a few different ways. When meeting in person, consider how the room is arranged. Make sure tables are all facing each other, and there are no outlying tables, so people are not excluded from conversation. Another way to make a conducive team atmosphere is to provide food or coffee. It is also important to have name tags or name plates, so people do not feel silly asking for someone's name when they have met before. Providing visuals and handouts recognizes that people process information differently, and some may need to see a timeline or need data in front of them.



## 2. Address everyone on the team by their first name, not by their title.

Addressing professionals on the team by their first name instead of their official title creates a sense of equality to the various agencies on the team. Removing the recognition or prioritization of titles allows for everyone to be viewed as peers, and therefore all thoughts, opinions, and recommendations carry the same importance and credibility.

## 3. Establish meeting ground rules and confidentiality at the start of each meeting.

Presenting the ground rules and the need for confidentiality when conducting case reviews establishes a safe place for information sharing. Establish clear and agreed-upon ground rules of conduct to set the tone for all current and future meetings. Remind team members that OFR meetings are not opportunities to place blame on the individual or on other agencies.

## 4. Introduce person-first language to the OFR team at the start of every meeting.

Person-first language is a way to show respect to all individuals and communicates in a way that puts personhood before labels. Introducing the concept of person-first language and striving to use it throughout the meeting will create a team

**Tip:** If a member makes a comment such as, "This overdose could never have been prevented," the facilitator should politely redirect members in a direction towards prevention. This may be as simple as saying, "While this case may be difficult to review, we have identified a few service gaps. Let us start with one of those and think about what improvements may benefit others."

### Tip:

Put a conversation on hold until after a meeting/create a "parking lot." The facilitator can tactfully ask the members to pause the discussion and move on to the next case or agenda item.

environment that shows dignity and respect to all people. An example of person-first language is saying "an individual with substance use disorder" instead of "a junkie" or "addict." Consistent reaffirmation of the use of person-first language will make the entire team accountable for the conversation throughout the meeting.

## 5. Ask reflective questions and clarifying questions.

OFR members represent different agencies and have varying life experiences and knowledge. Ensuring that everyone understands the information shared, current agency policies and procedures, and possible contributing factors will allow for stronger discussion and recommendations. Do not assume that everyone has the same baseline understanding.

## 6. Pay attention to the body language of team members.

Body language speaks just as loudly as verbal communication. Often if a person is feeling uncomfortable or disagrees with conversations, an individual may not want to speak up to the larger group, and that will be reflected in changes in their body language. To make sure any concerns are addressed and the members know they are valued, a facilitator can ask if members have anything to add during the meeting or check in with them after the meeting.

**Tip:**

Remain neutral and objective. Do not take sides in the dispute. Instead, ask members to focus on the facts of the case and the goal of the review—to prevent future overdose deaths.

**7. Get comfortable and lean into the silence.**

After asking the team a question, wait in silence before asking additional questions. Use this time to look at notes, write something down, or take a drink of water, but do not use that time to speak. Someone will respond to fill that silence. Be willing to wait and not fill that space.

**8. Ask “Who could have done what? When? How?” if you are struggling with generating recommendations.**

Asking a broad-sweeping question can seem too abstract to members. By asking a clear question on what could have been done differently by which agency and how that intervention would have worked, the team members can more easily identify potential solutions and who could be responsible for that recommendation.

**9. Connect with team members outside of meetings.**

Fostering relationship building does not just happen in a monthly meeting. Taking time to develop connections with each team member (such as meeting one-on-one) will strengthen future collaboration and increase communication. It will allow for an enriched understanding professionally and personally that the facilitator will be able to lean on down the road. It can also be an opportunity to address any tension or conflict in a private manner instead of during an OFR meeting.

**10. Meet people where they are, and do not force an agenda.**

Often in communities the same major partners convene at multiple meetings, and it is important to maintain positive relationships and not endanger future collaboration. While individuals may disagree during the OFR meeting, the facilitator needs to remind individuals of the goal of the meeting and not let conflicting opinions escalate. That does not mean steer away from difficult conversations, but instead maintain respect throughout that dialogue.

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