



GUIDED EXPERT REVIEWS

PURPOSE

The purpose of guided expert reviews is to gain informed perspectives from valued experts who are outside of the system(s).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPLICATIONS

Under certain circumstances, you, or others associated with the needs assessment, can be too familiar (or too unfamiliar) with the processes, procedures, people, tools, resources, performance data, or other variables that influence either current or desired performance in order to adequately complete a needs assessment. When this happens, expert reviews provide valuable external perspectives that can inform your needs assessment decisions. Use expert reviews to provide balanced perspectives when there are even minimal possibilities of predisposition or bias that could influence any needs assessment processes; including the data collection, information analysis, reporting of findings, and other activities that lead to program/project recommendations.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

ADVANTAGES

- Expert reviews allow you to have a "fresh set of eyes" that can provide new ideas and insights that might not have come about without the expert's participation.
- The involvement of expert reviewers in the needs assessment process can increase the credibility of the needs assessment process and findings, thereby potentially increasing stakeholder buy-in.
- The use of expert reviews may allow you to pursue strategies and approaches that make inherent sense for the context in which you may be working, but which you might not normally pursue if you did not have the assurance of the expert's careful review.
- Since experts generally bring insights and experiences from other (outside) contexts in which they have worked, the involvement of an expert in the needs assessment may make it possible for you to formally or informally benchmark against other, similar systems and/or contexts.

DISADVANTAGES

- It can be a challenge to identify reliable criteria for selecting experts to involve in the expert review process.
- If the context in which the needs assessment is being conducted is significantly different from the one in which the expert normally works, the extent to which the expert's observations and recommendations are relevant can be diminished.

- As is the case for any other individual, and expert's subjectivity and prior experience may affect the outcome of the expert review process (the effect of this can potentially be mitigated somewhat through the involvement of more than one expert).
- Soliciting insight from experts is can be expensive, and it may be difficult to find experts who are able to contribute large amounts of time responding (particularly if the area of expertise is one for which there is high demand).

GENERAL PROCEDURES

GETTING STARTED

1. Identify either a need (i.e., gap in performance and results) or a needs assessment decision (such as prioritizing needs or determining which mix of performance interventions will work best within your organization) that will be the focus of the expert review.
2. Determine what type of expert review you would like to conduct: *peer review* (judging the quality), *relevance review* (judging whether an organization's activities are relevant to its mission), and/or *benchmarking review* (judging the relative standing in an international perspective).

FINDING EXPERTS

Below are some of the considerations that are relevant when bringing experts on board for an expert review:

1. Generate a protocol for identifying appropriate experts to invite for the expert review process.
 - This protocol should be based on your understanding of the goals of your needs assessment, as well as the specific context in which the organization functions.
 - Carefully identify the skills and knowledge that someone should possess in order to meaningfully function as an expert reviewer for the needs assessment, and include those competencies in the protocol.
 - Apply the protocol as you search for potential experts.
2. Identify potential experts from *outside* of the system to participate in the review.
 - Experts can be from within the organization (but outside of the performance system that is the focus of the needs assessment), or from outside of the organization when they have expertise with the performance system or similar such systems.
3. Determine whether you would like experts to be invited as individuals or as teams.
4. Determine whether you would like local or foreign experts, or a combination of both. Consider carefully the benefits and drawbacks of involving experts from other countries. For instance;
 - An advantage of involving foreign experts may be that they bring dynamic new insights to the situation, and that they are able to size up the organization's relative standing from an international perspective.

- A drawback may be that the foreign expert's ability to leverage his/her expertise may be limited if he/she has no familiarity with the local country context.
 - In some developing country contexts, there is relatively modest capacity in certain areas of economic productivity, and it may thus be advisable to invite foreign experts to participate.
 - In many instances, using both local and foreign experts may provide you the "best of both worlds" mix.
5. As you begin to invite experts, find out about their availability during the time period for the expert review. Since these are experts, it is likely that they are in demand elsewhere, too, so you may have to do some creative planning so that you can work around scheduling restrictions while still meeting the goals of the expert review. For instance, if a given expert is not available to come on-site, you can determine if they can review other documentation and reports in order to give you quality input at a distance (for example, using audio and/or video conferences).
 6. Present the potential experts with unbiased background information on the purpose of their involvement in the needs assessment, and ask each potential expert to evaluate his/her experience and knowledge relative to the specific goals for your needs assessment.

PLANNING AND CONDUCTING THE EXPERT REVIEW

1. Define your objectives for the expert review (i.e., what results you expect to accomplish by the time the review is complete). Be realistic about what objectives can be accomplished. Determine when it is appropriate to use of each expert, knowing what they can and cannot do given the constraints of the situation.
2. Generate terms of reference that can be used by experts prior to arriving on-site. This will allow each expert to arrive prepared for the task. In addition, it will allow the expert(s) to locate any hard-to-find materials that they may want to consult during the expert review, without slowing down the expert review process.
3. Contact each expert reviewer and make arrangements for their participation. As noted previously, if one or more experts are not available for in-person participation, make arrangements to send relevant documentation that will allow the expert(s) to contribute at a distance.
4. Inform stakeholders/participants of role of expert reviewer(s).
5. Consider providing metrics or protocols that the experts can use during the expert review. Such metrics or protocols can be valuable in increasing the objectivity and transparency of an expert review process, and they can also increase the chances that the expert review results are aligned with the objectives you defined at the beginning of the process.
6. Collect the necessary background information for each expert reviewer. This information may be valuable later if you have to justify decisions made during the needs assessment.

7. Be sure to include specific "deliverables" for each reviewer and for each context in which the review is to take place. For instance, do you expect a written report at the conclusion of their review or will they be expected to present their findings during a presentation.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Develop and maintain list or inventory of program review experts (especially for larger scale efforts), to be used for subsequent expert review needs.
- Arrange logistics and provide on-site meeting support.
- Provide experts with specific guidelines or questions that should be used to guide the expert review process.
- Watch out for experts who may have an "agenda" of their own in completing the review (for example, making recommendations in order to gain future consulting contracts with your organization).
- If you are inviting experts from outside contexts, equip experts with some information that will give them insight into the context in which the expert review will take place. This is especially important if experts are being invited from foreign countries where cultural and business practices may be significantly different than in the context in which the needs assessment is being conducted.
- To the extent possible, schedule the on-site expert review process during a time when the organization is otherwise functioning in a generally "normal" way. This increases the chances that the expert review yields relevant results, and it also ensures that others in the organization are not negatively impacted by the presence of the outside experts.
- Prepare reports on the results of each review. In the reports, identify the relationship of the expert review to the needs assessment, the goal of the specific expert review, the competencies/expertise of the expert or expert team, the type of expert review conducted, the findings from the expert review, and the potential implications of the findings for the needs assessment.