



Tips for Engaging Participants on Calls: Strategies to Support Distance-Learning

Your primary goal in facilitating calls is to engage all participants in the process of learning through collaboration. This is not an easy task, considering that you cannot read body language or make eye contact with participants on phone calls! Below we offer a few ideas to help you diversify your strategies for engaging participants on calls. After reviewing this list, we invite you to come up with additional ideas that work for your LC group. Keep in mind that as you become familiar with each other's voices and the call structure, all activities will become easier to facilitate.

Awareness of Different Learning Styles

Remain mindful that your preferred learning style may differ from the diverse styles of call participants. To overcome these differences, mix up the teaching methods you use on calls, and check in with participants either on the calls or via brief surveys.

Relationship Building

Participants feel more comfortable engaging with one another on calls if they know the other people on the call. Provide icebreakers and simple getting-to-know-you questions on the first few calls to begin forming relationships. Follow these efforts with face-to-face time during the learning sessions for each group of call participants.

Pre-Call Assignments

Pre-call assignments help participants prepare thoughtful responses prior to a call. Distribute these pre-call assignments at least a week prior to the call to give participants enough time to fully prepare. Sample pre-call assignments include readings, videos, or online activities, along with questions to consider or observations to share about the resource. Doing these types of assignments helps give participants a shared experience and common task to discuss.

Round Robin

Conduct a "round robin" in which all call participants take turns responding to a specific question. For example, ask each participant to identify a clinical strength or share a challenge they might benefit from addressing in the group. You may find it helpful to design a participant list so that you can call on participants around the virtual circle. When using this technique, it is helpful to let participants know in advance so that they don't feel 'cold called.'

Role Assignments

Assign listening roles to specific participants to help engage them when there will be a didactic presentation on a call. For example, prior to a didactic lecture, you might assign some participants to listen for specific points made during the lecture, and then to share with the group during the last 15 minutes or so of the call. You might assign two participants to be "Supporters" —who will listen for two ideas that they like, and prepare to say why they support these ideas. You might assign 2 participants to be "Naysayers"—who will have to come up with two ideas they disagree with, and be prepared to explain why they disagree. Two participants might be "Questioners," who will identify two questions for the group to discuss. And finally, two other participants might be "Reflectors," who will share the thoughts that the lecture stirred up for them.

Open-Ended Questions

Ask open-ended questions that pose a challenge, inviting rich discussion on the calls. During these discussions, keep track of who is talking. In order to draw out quieter participants during open discussions, try calling on them and encouraging them to offer their opinions. One of the key inhibitors to participant engagement on calls is the fear that they must only share expertise and successes. In order to avoid this assumption, create opportunities for participants to share challenges, barriers, questions, and confusion during these open-ended discussions.

Case Studies

Invite Clinicians to present case studies on a rotating basis. Please see the handout entitled “Case Presentation Formats” later in Lesson 11 for ideas on structuring case presentations on calls.

Interactive Technology

If possible, use interactive technology to enhance engagement on the calls. The chat boards, polling and voting options, and ability to display documents through these platforms allow you to address the learning styles of those participants who are not aural learners. A participant who likes to reflect on her responses might prefer to comment in a chat box instead of speaking. In order for people to use the technology comfortably, make sure you give them time to practice on the initial calls. It’s sometimes helpful to ask Faculty to initiate some of these options; for example, ask a Faculty member to type a thought or comment in the chat box to encourage others to follow.

Role Play

Role plays offer a rich opportunity for Clinicians to practice their skills and receive immediate feedback. One option is to assign participants a role play to do at their agencies, and then come to the call prepared to tell about their experiences. Or, you might conduct the role play during the call. A group role play is a non-threatening option for those who may be intimidated by the idea of role playing on the phone. With a Faculty member playing the client role, call participants rotate practicing a specific skill in the role of Clinician.

Team Co-Facilitation of Calls

As teams move through the LC, they will be transitioning from the roles of learners to teachers. Inviting participants or teams to co-facilitate specific topics gives them the opportunity to highlight their successes. Team-facilitated calls also allow for a different type of collegial engagement between peers.