



Ping Pong Protocol

A Consultancy for Groups

Developed by Vermont SRI.

The purpose of this protocol is to assist a group in having substantive discussion about an issue that all of its members collectively face. There is no presenter in this protocol, and no facilitator is needed if the group takes joint responsibility for following the protocol.

Note: The Ping Pong Protocol may also be used by a group to explore a topic of interest.

It is important that all members of the group enter into this protocol in the spirit of self-reflection and improvement. Everyone should be prepared to change their practice if the protocol reveals an opportunity for improvement on their part. The next steps determined at the end of the protocol might include actions for all or just some of the members to take, but at the outset everyone should engage in the protocol with a willingness to take personal steps to address the issue at hand.

1. Pose the problem (5 minutes)

Someone in the group states the issue to be addressed. This may be done in the form of a question that the group would like to explore together. Check to see if there is agreement on the issue at hand; re-frame as needed.

2. Writing (10 minutes)

Everyone writes about the problem from their own point of view.

From this point on, if the group is larger than 8, smaller groups can be formed. Create groups that include diverse perspectives on the issue. This writing will be shared aloud with the group in the next step.

3. Share the reflections (15 minutes, depending on the size of the group. If there are multiple groups, add time for highlights from each group to be reported out.)

Each person has the opportunity to explain their own approach to the problem from their writing, and they are written in bullet form on chart paper. After each presentation, clarifying questions are asked of the writer, if necessary.

4. Probing questions (20 minutes, depending on the size of the group)

Each member of the group has an opportunity to ask a probing question of any other group member or members (See Pocket Guide to Probing Questions). It is important that each person in the group gets the chance to respond to at least one probing question. This can continue until clarity is reached or as long as time allows.

5. Writing to synthesize what we've heard (10 minutes)

This is an opportunity for each group member to make sense of what's been said. This writing will be used to inform the next step.

6. Next steps conversation (20 minutes, depending on the size of the group)

Ideas for next steps toward addressing the problem are shared and charted. It is helpful if participants explain how they came to each next step. The group determines what step(s) it will take. If there are multiple groups, combine them for this step.

7. Debrief (5 minutes)