

AAMC GSA PDI: Collaborative Discussion Guide





Background

The intent of this document is to provide an overview of the GSA performance framework as part of the GSA Professional Development Initiative. For further information on the Initiative and available support, go to www.aamc.org/gsapdi and/or send a message to GS Apro-develop@aamc.org. Contact the Initiative sponsor for more immediate needs – Geoffrey Young, AAMC Senior Director, GSA Student Affairs and Programs, gyoung@aamc.org.

particular, we thank the current and former members of the GSA Professional Development Initiative Advisory Group for their dedication and guidance. We also acknowledge Sophia T.S. Weibel of STS Human Resource Consulting, as an acting member of the AAMC's Learning, Leadership Development, and Evaluation team. Her contributions have been instrumental in facilitating the evolution of the Initiative and development of the validated GSA Framework and associated documentation and tools.

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This guide is designed to help you, as a GSA professional, effectively engage in collaborative discussions with your supervisor, mentor, and/or other trusted colleagues to **discuss and define** your professional development goals, and to **reflect and respond** to your performance in support of executing your professional development plan.

Setting the Foundation for Collaboration

As you begin your professional development discussions, it's important to first establish and agree on expectations for how you and your supervisor, mentor and/or other trusted colleagues will work together to support your professional development.

Consider the following questions to help you clarify your mutual expectations:

- What are the main responsibilities each person has in this relationship?
- How often will you meet formally?
- How will you stay connected informally?
- How will you proactively monitor goal progression, performance trends, and overall contributions?
- What else is important to discuss in order to build and maintain a collaborative and trusting relationship?



Collaborative Discussion Process

Formal and informal professional development discussions will be the most productive if they occur throughout the year, as well as in support of a set performance evaluation process. Consider the general steps below to ensure a positive and productive experience for all involved.

1. Prepare for the discussion.

- Be clear on the purpose of your discussion and what each party needs to do in preparation. Set specific objectives to focus on during the discussion.
- To help facilitate the discussion, you may also ask your supervisor to come prepared with his or her point-of-view on your performance.
- Agree on a date and time, and make sure there is a private space available to enable open discussion.
- Get ready by referring back to the work you did using the *GSA Performance Framework* and the *GSA Performance Reflection and Assessment Guide*, as well as any informal feedback you gathered.

2. Engage in collaborative discussion.

- Ask thought-provoking and open-ended questions.
- Balance talking and listening – when unclear about what's being said, confirm your understanding before responding.
- Stay focused, physically and mentally, and do not multi-task.
- Take notes on key discussion points and agreements made.

- Identify topics for future discussion, confirm a timetable for next steps as well as a date for your next meeting.

3. Conduct follow-up and close the loop.

- After the discussion, summarize meeting highlights and agreements (perhaps in a follow-up email) to confirm a shared understanding.
- Monitor agreed upon activities, and follow up as needed.
- If necessary, send an email or have a brief discussion to ensure everyone is satisfied with the follow-up activities.
- Hold each other accountable for the agreed upon activities and keep each other informed of potential delays and/or the need for further discussion.

Tips for Increasing Collaboration

Build Trust. At the core of collaborative discussions is trust. The more trusting our relationships are the more willing we are to share openly and have confidence in the guidance, advocacy, and support we will receive in achieving our professional development goals. Stephen M.R. Covey outlines key behaviors in his book, *The Speed of Trust*, to enable trusting relationships with others.

- **Demonstrate Respect.** Get to really know those around you. Understanding others' preferences, interests, and preferred work styles will help you to have more honest conversations, capitalize on similarities, and show appreciation for differences.
- **Keep Commitments.** If you agree on goals and key actions, your follow-through is the real sign of your level of commitment. There are no excuses for falling short or not achieving a goal if it's something that is truly important.
- **Right the Wrongs.** If you know you are wrong, it shows great character to take ownership for your actions and make things right.
- **Show loyalty.** It's important to represent the best in others even when they are not present. If someone is saying something about another person in their absence, it's your responsibility to encourage them to have a conversation directly with that person.
- **Talk Straight.** Honesty is the best policy. If you want other people to understand your thoughts and feelings it's important to share them. If you feel like you're talking around something, then you probably are.

Remember, it's the little day-to-day behaviors that will impact how trustworthy and credible you are perceived. Focus on the small behaviors and take responsibility for building and sustaining positive relationships.

Practice Active Listening. In today's world of multi-tasking, we are losing the skill of true listening – empathic listening. That means listening for the sole purpose of understanding **before** responding or sharing our point-of-view. Some specific strategies to practice empathic listening are:

- **Ask questions with care** . . . on the issue or topic, then ask one question and wait for a response.
- **Be reflective** . . . on the content you hear, and the emotions you perceive or observe.
- **Focus-Reflect-Respond** . . . by hearing the words and the meaning, then confirming your understanding. Avoid jumping to conclusions prematurely.
- **Paraphrase** . . . “so what you’re saying is...” or “let me make sure I understand you correctly...”
- **Search for the facts** . . . by “peeling the onion.” Ask a series of open-ended questions to get to the facts and/or root of the situation.
- **Send supportive non-verbal cues** . . . by making eye contact and being aware of your facial expression and body language. If you are in a virtual meeting, express support verbally.

Focus On The Big Picture. Having the ability to understand professional development from a broader lens may help you identify small successes toward your long-term goals and career aspirations. Consider utilizing the *GSA Goal Development and Execution Guide* as well as the Stop-Start-Continue technique outlined below to help you discuss and evaluate your performance and professional development periodically.

- **GSA Goal Development and Execution Guide.** You may have used this tool as you discussed and defined your development goals and plan. Review it periodically to identify and acknowledge your progress, and make adjustments if you anticipate or experience setbacks or shifts in your goals.
- **Stop-Start-Continue.** Collect ongoing feedback and performance observations, and collaborate with your supervisor to decide the frequency (e.g., monthly, quarterly, bi-annually) in which you will meet to share your perspectives using the following prompts:
 - “Reflecting upon my performance and activities in alignment with my role expectations and professional development goals, I should...
 1. **STOP** doing the following things. . .
 2. **START** doing the following things. . .
 3. **CONTINUE** doing the following things. . .”