

Protocols are structured processes and guidelines to promote meaningful, efficient communication, problem solving, and learning. Protocols give time for active listening and reflection, and ensure that all voices in the group are heard and honored. Using protocols appropriately in meetings with colleagues, students, parents, and others helps you build the skills and the culture necessary for productive collaborative work.

In meetings using protocols:

- Time protected for active listening and silent reflection
- Equity and parity are emphasized and valued so all voices will be heard
- Participants feel safe to ask difficult questions and give and receive honest feedback
- Focus on specific pieces of work or dilemmas, in an honest attempt to address and resolve “the elephants in the room”
- Participants gain differing perspectives and leave feeling empowered and optimistic, with actionable next steps

In some meetings, without protocols:

- Speaking over one another, jumping to speak, speaking without thinking first, digressions
- A few voices doing most of the talking, others silent or silenced, many distant or disengaged
- People feeling attacked or abused by others
Defensiveness and “us vs. them” abounds
- Bickering, endlessly complaining about the same problems over and over again, or stonewalling/defeated silence
- People leave the meeting without clear next steps or much hope for progress

Although protocols are not needed for some meetings (such as those for disseminating information or updating participants without inviting feedback), once a group becomes accustomed to using protocols, they’re more likely to collaborate more efficiently and effectively even when protocols are not being used.

Like guardrails along a highway, NSRF protocols, under the leadership of a trained coach, provide guidance and a safe place for honest and useful feedback. They also ensure that the group involved arrives at the proposed destination rather than being pulled off-track.

NSRF has a vast array of protocols to help participants:

- Address complex dilemmas with fresh perspectives
- Improve their work quickly with thought-provoking questions
- Share and learn from successes
- Introduce ideas, topics, or programs
- Expand thinking, find essential messages, discover other perspectives
- Interpret data
- Observe classrooms and environments to improve teaching, coaching, learning, or other work
- Brainstorm and improve projects, plans, or materials at any stage of progress
- Look at student work with specific objectives and needs in mind to improve outcomes.