

“GETTING IN” GUIDE

A Roadmap to Successful Hospital Partnerships



1. PREPARE TO APPROACH How to Initiate the Partnership

2. GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR How to Make the Connection

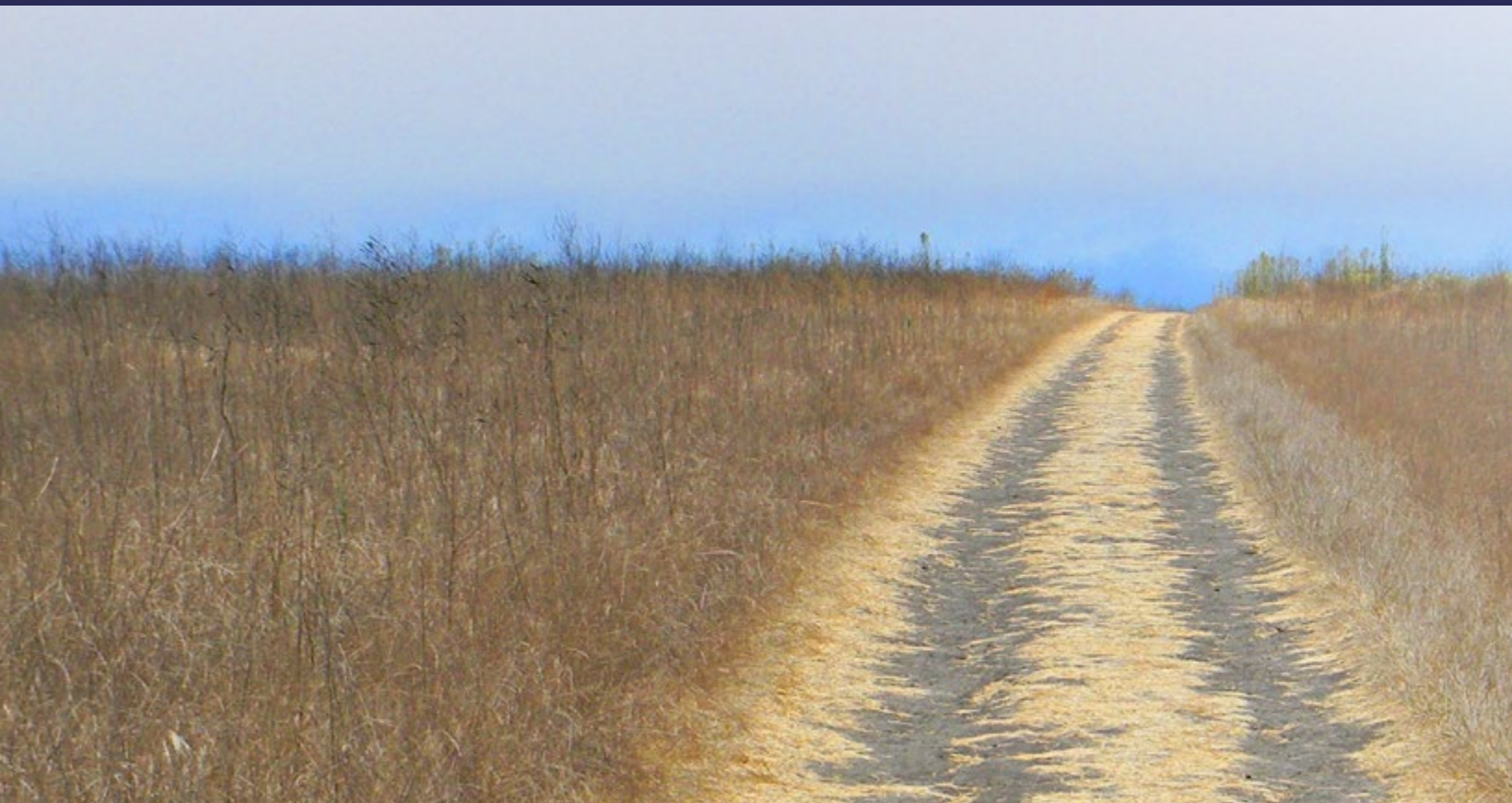
3. BUILD THE PARTNERSHIP What to Do Now That You're In

4. MAINTAIN MOMENTUM How to Advance Progress and Cultivate the Partnership

5. SHARE RESULTS FOR THE NEXT LEVEL How to Showcase the Work

GET STARTED

As leaders in state hospital associations and quality improvement organizations, one of our key focus areas is collaboration with hospitals. For some hospitals, this collaboration is welcomed as part of the organization's overall patient safety and ongoing performance improvement planning. For others, it's difficult to build this collaborative relationship.



Are there hospitals in your state that:

- Don't want your help?
- Are tough to communicate with?
- Don't return your emails or calls?
- Don't attend meetings or virtual educational events?
- Don't submit timely or complete data?

If so, you're not alone! This document is a field guide for quality improvement leaders at the state level, to provide guidance and suggestions about how to build successful partnerships with hospitals when connection is difficult.

Step 1 PREPARE TO APPROACH



INITIATE THE PARTNERSHIP

Mentally prepare by asking yourself how you'll deal with the frustration, disappointment or potentially even anger. How will you overcome the seeming futility of trying?

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME (WIFM)?

- Establish a long-term, working relationship with the hospital.
- Become their “go-to” person for all things related to patient safety.
- Transform leadership transitions into opportunities instead of disruptions, because you're so integrated across departments and at various levels.
- Find joy in work derived from growth, teamwork, creativity and achievement.
- Achieve state-level success driven by large hospitals' full engagement and success.

BUILD RESILIENCE IN PREPARATION, AND REMEMBER:

- This is about decreasing harm for patients.
- Be prepared to listen more than speak.
- Reframe failure: Expect failure; each failure is one step closer to SUCCESS.
- Be patient! Think of this as courting a long-term relationship.
- You have contributions to make towards their success.
- Don't get discouraged if they decline multiple times. They know you're there to help when they're ready.
- **Don't forget what's in it for THEM, including:**
 - Evidence-based and newly emerging best practices in patient harm reduction.
 - A peer network of like hospitals.
 - Subject-matter experts for specialized coaching.
 - Benchmarking data with like hospitals.
 - Improvement coaching at the system, department, unit or team levels.
 - Comprehensive data system, improvement calculator and hospital-level reports.
 - Personal and professional satisfaction associated with overcoming the barriers and challenges that previously held them back.
 - Satisfaction from being part of or leading a successful team.

PREPARE TO APPROACH: STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD

- Do your homework on the hospital before you call:
 - Learn everything you can about the hospital before you approach it initially: Value-based Purchasing (VBP) scores/penalties, Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers & Systems (HCAHPS) issues, leadership changes, organizational changes, other initiatives or engagement with other organizations, and strategic goals—previous and current.
 - If they have a governing system that demands other measures be their first priority, be ready to help them with those quality needs in addition to the other state projects. Let them know you're on their team to help them any way you can.
- Use these relationship strategies:
 - Establish a non-judgmental, trusting relationship with the organization.
 - Be empathetic and put yourself in their shoes. They might have a large team or be the only person in their department. Express your desire to make their job easier by providing the tools they're looking for.
 - When you've seen **one** hospital culture, you've seen **one** hospital culture; treat each hospital individually, as you would want them to treat their patients.
 - Meet them where they are: There may be dynamics that result in lack of alignment across departments, divisions and/or leaders of key areas.

GETTING DISCOURAGED? NEED A PEP TALK? REMEMBER:

- Every “no” is closer to “yes.”
- Reframe organizational “non-compliance” into: What are we not doing to understand and engage this hospital to be successful? Do we have the right person, right message and right timing?
- Think about other hospitals that were a challenge and eventually engaged.
- Give them a 90-day rest. Put a tickler on your calendar to reach out to someone new or with a new offering in 90 days. Let them know you're giving them a rest—so they can appreciate the breathing room and understand your lapse in contact.

Step 2 GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR



MAKE THE CONNECTION

Get creative about establishing connections, understanding your stakeholders, and communicating solutions to align with their priorities.

GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR: STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD

- “In the neighborhood”—Make an unannounced, casual drop-in visit when scheduling a meeting doesn’t work.
 - During drop-in visits, you may see staff nurses or support staff and give them something that helps them; for example, how they can get continuing education credits (CEUs).
 - Visits can be short—sometimes 15-30 minutes is enough.
- Be patient! Before asking the hospital for something, think about what you can offer:
 - Share what competitors are taking advantage of with the State Hospital Association offerings. Share examples of the assistance other colleagues in your hospitals have received or benefited from. Begin to shift the conversation from competition to allies in patient safety. Offer to link them with others who are similar to them but not seen as competitors.
 - Share stories of solutions from other hospitals that you work with, and offer to facilitate communication or mentoring.
- Don’t be afraid of the CEO; he or she can be your champion:
 - Try to get 15 minutes on the CEO’s calendar. If that proves difficult, have your State Hospital Association CEO set up the call and have you join. Ask these open-ended questions:
 1. “What keeps you awake at night?”
 2. “If your loved one was admitted to your hospital, what harm would you fear?”
 - Help them fix the problem that the CEO sees as their most pressing issue.
 - Regardless of passion for certain topics, the state or quality leader has to help the CEO accomplish quality goals that are the most important to the facility at that time. Once you help here, they will trust you to help on other topics.
 - Share offerings that align with their priorities; i.e., links to resources and tools.
- Acknowledge that they’re busy with patient care, and explain that you and the State Hospital Association are here to learn about their organization and help them find possible solutions, best practices, etc.

GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR: STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD, CONT.

- Check in periodically by email or phone just to see what's on their plate. Engage in hall talk during breaks if you see them at other meetings locally. Confirm best days and times to reach them.
- Be respectful of their time. Emails, calls and meetings take valuable time. Be concise with your words, yet encourage and allow them to talk about personal issues or their agendas.
- Try these relationship strategies:
 - Be positive and energetic.
 - Be relentless, yet respectful.
 - Connect on a personal level and build your credibility: Share a brief history of yourself and why you work with quality now.

BREAK DOWN SILOS

- Connection can begin with one person. You don't need to tackle the entire hospital.
- Identify your connectors:
 - Try a new stakeholder—perhaps a CEO, board member, or someone in the risk, quality and corporate departments.
 - If your usual points of contacts in other organizations aren't willing to connect, who else might benefit from collaboration at the state level? In some organizations, there may be dynamics that result in lack of alignment and conflicting priorities, so be open to approaching other leaders. Consider an infection prevention professional, a nursing leader, a pharmacist or a physician champion.
 - Who in your organization might be able to make the initial connection for you? Think CEO to CEO, or state infection prevention, lead to hospital lead.

STILL STUCK OUTSIDE: NOW WHAT?

- Circle back to the initial pep talk in Step 1 if you're getting discouraged.
- Use their bright spots, identified through statewide data, to find topics to highlight when trying to connect. Is there an area for which their public data is better than average (or even average)? Would they be willing to connect to share what they're doing in that area?
 - Look at their Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) readmissions penalties, HCAHPS scores for successes, or for issues affected by Hospital Improvement Innovation Networks (HIIN) initiatives.
- Attend meetings, hospital events that key staff attend for visibility, and brief hallway conversations.
 - Go to any local meeting where you might catch your quality initiative (QI) lead, other directors, or CEO—and make a casual elevator speech during a break about why you and the quality support might be helpful.

Step 3 BUILD THE PARTNERSHIP



NOW THAT YOU'RE IN...

Help them understand you're not there to fix them. Understand their dynamics to optimize your relationship with them and help the organization operate more efficiently in their quality improvement and patient safety duties. Connect the dots between state partner collaboration and ongoing improvement. Provide solutions and ideas to address barriers to progress such as working in silos, revolving door of key leadership positions, etc.

BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD

One suggestion from a colleague: Give them a taste of the value of your work to get them interested and before you know it, they're in.

- Meet the hospital needs first.
- Provide team development up and down the org chart, and understand their connections.
- Develop a communication strategy: What, how, how often and with whom.
- Listen for what's most important to the team and align your support and solutions. Provide support for the areas in which they're focused now, instead of just focusing on your goals and deliverables.
 - Ask this question: "If you had a magic wand and could fix one thing, what would that be?"
- Give them education with easy access, talk about what you can provide that makes life easier for them, ask what their physicians need, and look for wins.
- **Relentlessly follow through and follow up** on what's important to the organization. Prove the value of engaging with you.
 - Circle back within a day, so they know they can count on you! This is the best way to gain trust.
- **Learn their strengths** to understand how they operationalize improvements successfully.
 - What other initiatives or national projects have they been involved with in recent years? (Magnet, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) initiatives, Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP), TeamSTEPPS, Just Culture, Baldrige, etc.)
 - Ask to see or discuss findings from their last Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), annual quality or strategy report, or HCAHPS report.

BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD, CONT.

- Be specific—share a specific listserv idea or strategy with a hospital on a topic they are working on. Personally forward the listserv or resource to the hospital and say, “I thought about our conversation when I saw this; maybe it will help?”
- Consider what would make them stand out. How do you connect this to community and professional organizations? (For example: Association of Professionals in Infection Control (APIC), American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN), American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL))

RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES

- Everyone matters...
 - Get to know leaders in key areas, including pharmacy, nursing, rehab, physicians and quality risk.
 - You never know who the next CEO will be!
- This is still a courtship. Your role is to get to know the organization so that you can understand how to provide value.
 - Send an email or card to everyone you meet with, to thank them for their time, and provide a few bullet points about the discussion/action items, resources, etc.
 - Show up for a hospital event (grand opening of new hospital, unit, etc.) and connect with your contacts.
- Send a card or email for a loss, new baby, change of position, etc.
- New C-suite leaders, directors or new QI staff coming on is a good excuse for a site visit to meet and educate the new person about the value of the State Partnership. Use this as an opportunity to re-educate the entire team.
- Discover which peers they look to for motivation, and help them to make connections to those peers if they don't already have a collaborative relationship.

STUCK IN THE QUALITY LEAD'S OFFICE?

STRATEGIES FROM THE FIELD: MOVING BEYOND THE QUALITY DEPARTMENT

- Spread and deepen your connections within the organization; know and communicate directly with the pharmacist, case manager, nursing leader(s), administrative assistant to the CEO, directors of lab, physical therapy and wound care—whoever touches the problem daily.
- Focus on developing teamwork and breaking down silos: Make sure all relevant leaders are invited to any meetings, including the CEO.
- If you communicate directly with other hospital staff, always “cc” the key contact (which is usually Quality) or find out how they want to be included in communications.
- Understand data-submission issues and challenges:
 - Recruit additional individuals outside of quality to assist in data collections.
 - Escalate as necessary to secure needed support.

Step 4 MAINTAIN MOMENTUM



ADVANCE PROGRESS, CULTIVATE THE PARTNERSHIP

Be their “GO TO” person for guidance on all things related to patient safety.

- Partner with them to continue to drive improvement and align the work with the organization’s goals. Bring project data to review in a spirit of curiosity, not to judge or evaluate.
- Spend time with their improvement teams.
 - Bring stories to build credibility about safety advancements in the field. What are the early adopters doing? What is the community standard?
- Encourage connection on topics they’re excelling in.
 - Suggest and encourage presentations at local, regional and national meetings.
- Share data and CEO reports. Customize reports to meet their needs.

Step 5 SHARE RESULTS FOR THE NEXT LEVEL



SHOWCASE THEIR WORK

The organization aligns quality structures to accomplish goals:

- Embed yourself in the organization: Participate and observe in committees and teams.
- Consider what else you can provide and to whom, to improve knowledge, teamwork, culture, patient and employee satisfaction.
 - Share information about just-in-time onsite or local trainings and conferences, local experts and professional certifications.
- Advance high performers, individuals and hospitals to the state and national stage.
 - Enlist high achievers as peer mentors.
- Promote cross-cutting strategies, including:
 - Culture of safety, Just Culture and High Reliability Organizing (HRO).
 - Worker safety.

- Patient and Family Engagement (PFE)—the most underutilized resources.
- Spread the concept of cross-functional teams:
 - Create synergy in topics, and consider cross-cutting strategies.
 - Implement a house-wide approach.
- Remind them that quality is a way of doing business, NOT just a department:
 - Quality is the orchestra conductor (coach); each instrument group must improve their own section. This is the distributive model of quality.
- Promote transparency of reporting.

CONGRATULATIONS!

..... *Time to Celebrate!*

Cynosure Health is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving healthcare by fostering innovative solutions to address healthcare's toughest challenges. For over two decades, the Cynosure team has delivered far-reaching results with a steady focus on driving sustained, high-impact change. Contact us at Cynosure@CynosureHealth.org or 916-772-6090, or go to CynosureHealth.org to learn more.

