

This fact sheet outlines what to think about when setting up and running a successful Advisory Board meeting.

1 What is an Advisory Board?

Advisory Boards are used to obtain advice and feedback from the top tier of physicians in a specific therapy area, either in relation to developmental drugs or to new data on existing marketed products. They are also used to obtain a clearer understanding of the management of a medical condition, especially when a pharmaceutical company is new to the therapy area.¹

Advisory Boards can be established as early as Phase I of product development but they are more commonly convened once proof of concept has been established in humans at Phase II. The Board can provide important input in several areas:

- The therapeutic area, current and future clinical practice, and how a product fits into the market
- The product profile and whether it fulfils previously unmet clinical needs
- The Phase III clinical research program
- The interpretation and robustness of data prior to publication and presentation
- Publications strategy
- Launch plans
- Market expansion initiatives
- Mature product opportunities.

An Advisory Board is also an excellent way of developing relations with KOLs in an informal setting away from the pressures of their everyday clinical practice.

2 Choosing the chair

- An external chairperson is essential in order to give an Advisory Board credibility. It is, however, common for an internal medical director to co-chair the Board's meetings.
- Choose a chairperson of international standing, someone pre-eminent in their field, but balance this with the need to build a good working relationship. You need someone who understands what you are trying to achieve and who you know can control a meeting well.
- Select the chairperson before inviting any Board members because he/she is likely to have valuable insight into personalities as well as skills.

¹ An Advisory Board is an internally focused meeting. The information gleaned from it is never disseminated outside of the group of attendees or the sponsoring company and, indeed, may be highly confidential. Other meeting formats, such as expert panels or consensus meeting, intended for wider distribution or publication are very different in design and scope.

3 Choosing Board members

- Group dynamics generally dictate that roundtable meetings of more than 15 people cannot effectively provide for free discussion, so it is more effective to limit the number of participants.
- Invite Board members well in advance of the first meeting – preferably several months before.
- An international Advisory Board should comprise physicians from countries that are important to the product's success. Depending on the size and diversity of the market, it may be necessary to establish separate Advisory Boards for different geographic regions; eg, Europe, North America, Asia etc.
- Consider the key market drivers that affect your product (eg, diagnostic practice, clinical guidelines, economic issues) and who influences prescribing (eg, top tier OLS, nurse specialists, patient groups etc).
- Again, from an international perspective, affiliate marketing teams should be consulted over who to invite because the process will cascade down to the country level. A world-renowned KOL from a particular country may not be the best choice from the affiliate's perspective.
- Think about the relationships between Board members to avoid potential conflicts. A sensible approach is to choose the chairman first and work with that person to construct a Board that will meet the company's needs as well as satisfy the chairman's views.
- Develop a strategy for KOLs already on competitors' Advisory Boards. Many eminent physicians are members of more than one Board for competing or similar products, so you should think about whether this matters to you and whether you regard it as a conflict.
- Develop a logical honorarium structure for participants, based on local fair market value, pre-work and time at the meeting.
- Ask KOLs to sign confidentiality agreements in advance of the meeting and be aware of all local guidelines that govern interaction with physicians. Be aware that, despite the signed agreement, there is often leakage of information. If you have data that are highly sensitive commercially, an Advisory Board may not be the best place to air it.

4 When and where

- Advisory Boards may be convened on a regular basis (usually annually) or *ad hoc* to examine particular issues that arise during a product's life cycle.
- Look at your medical-marketing plan to determine the critical time points when you will need advice; eg, after analysis of Phase II pivotal trials.
- Avoid conference weeks but if it is the only way you can capture the people you need, arrange the meeting *before* the conference.
 - Note that some conference secretariats prohibit private meetings before, during or after a conference.
- Avoid weeks when there are public holidays, and August when most of continental Europe is on vacation.
- A weekend is almost always better for physicians as most have to use personal time to attend such meetings. Arrivals should ideally be scheduled for Friday evening.
- Depending on how much data you have to present and discuss, an Advisory Board meeting can last 1 or 1½ days.

- By holding the meeting on 1 day you are faced with the problem of people trying to leave early to catch a late afternoon/evening flight. If this is the case, start and finish early (8.00 AM – 4.00 PM) and be clear what is the earliest flight departure time that you will accept by advisors
- A 1½-day meeting allows for a more discussion time, with time for break out activities, brainstorming, considering other portfolio issues etc.
- See figure below.

		FRIDAY			SATURDAY		
		AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve
1 day 1½ days	1 day						
	1½ days						
Arrivals/departures							
Meeting							
Working dinner							

- Find a location that is easily accessible for the majority of attendees, with as short an airport transfer as possible.
- Elite KOLs are often “travel-weary” and prefer either a convenient fly-in, fly-out location or someplace that is unusual and away from the usual conference circuit.
- Ensure that you comply with Pharma industry guidelines regarding flights, accommodation and meals. These days gifts are not appropriate.

5 The agenda

- Develop clearly defined objectives and stick to them.
- Keep the presentations succinct and allow plenty of time for discussion, with agreement on key actions.
- Build in some hidden time for over-run.
- Consider using break-out groups and/or workshops only if:
 - There are specific issues to discuss with distinct groups of OLs; eg, those involved with diagnosis vs treatment, hospital vs community, Europe vs North America, etc.
 - The group is large (>20 people) and splitting them up will help speed up discussion
 - Certain personalities will dominate the discussion in a larger group.

6 Presentations

- Ask principal clinical trial investigators to present trial data and KOLs to present clinical/medical issues; they have more credibility with peers than pharmaceutical company colleagues.
- Keep presentations brief and to the point. Brief speakers about their presentations. Ask for slides to be sent at least one week before the meeting. Your agency will be able to assist you with formatting slides to a clear and consistent style.
- Keep to timelines – remember you want the KOLs’ thoughts and opinions.

7 On site

- Have a slide review the day before your meeting.
- Identify problem areas/issues and develop a strategy to handle them.
- Put all the presentations onto one laptop and ask your agency to link the slides into a smooth-running show.
 - Make sure the agency gives you a copy of all slide presentations at the end of the meeting.
- If allowed, record the meeting. These days it's possible to do this directly onto CD, with each presentation as a separate track.
- Ask your agency to note-take and prepare a post-meeting report of key discussion points and actions.
 - Do not rely on a transcript. The discussion will inevitably jump around a little, and people never talk in sentences, so a verbatim transcript is difficult to read and to follow.

8 Follow-up

- Thank all participants in writing, and pay honoraria and expenses as soon as possible after the meeting.
- The report should be sent out within one month of the meeting.
 - If there are action points, ensure that they are acted upon.
- Find a way to maintain contact with Board members between meetings. For example, consider informal get-togethers at major congresses, perhaps a dinner or a short meeting.

**If you have any comments on this fact sheet, please contact
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