## Speaker

## Meagan Eldridge

*Eldridge Writing & Consulting, LLC*

## By Laura Sommerville, PhD

*On May 16th, Meagan Eldridge, MS, presented a framework for leading the collaborative authoring process to achieve optimal results. Meagan is the Founder and Owner of Eldridge Writing & Consulting, LLC and a dedicated member of the American Medical Writers Association Carolinas Chapter.*

Collaborative authoring typically consists of a few teams each dedicated to the drafting, revising, and approval of the document. Although collaborative authoring benefits document creation by providing full access to the document, tracking changes in real time, and streamlining communication, certain drawbacks can have the opposite effect.

For example, full accessibility and tracked changes may initiate too many edits at once, which can create formatting issues that are arduous to resolve. Additionally, easy communication may lead to numerous comment threads without clear direction or action items.

To gain the most benefit from collaborative authoring, medical writers must safeguard against potential drawbacks while also taking ownership of the document. This requires one to be organized, process-driven, communicative, and diplomatic. Meagan provided the following roadmap with suggestions to implement at each phase of the authoring process, which can help a medical writer effectively lead this process from start to finish.

1. **Set clear expectations and roles**

* During the kickoff meeting, be sure to define the document and its typical components.
* Ensure each person understands why the document is being written and any developmental milestones or downstream documents the current document will be supporting.
* Identify inputs that may be needed, such as data, a study concept, or other dependencies.
* Identify the individuals who will write the document, which pieces they will be responsible for, and who will be the key decision-makers.

1. **Establish an achievable timeline**

* Determine the document’s priority and whether there is a hard due date.
* Mitigate the risk of missing the deadline by accounting for potential conflicts (e.g., conferences, paid time off, parental leave, etc.) and any data that may be pending.
* Ensure the timeline accounts for all necessary steps and responsibilities, including shell preparation (medical writer), drafting (writing team), clean up (document owner), review (review team), adjudication (medical writer with input from the writing team as needed), and an adjudication meeting (writing and/or review team).

1. **Prepare a robust template**

* A document template is a roadmap for collaborative authoring. The better it is, the smoother the process will be.
* Make sure the team is clear on what they are supposed to provide and where their contributions are supposed to go.
* Make it easy for the authors to find things in the document using @name and other tools.

1. **Oversee document development**

* Send reminders during the authoring process and tell the writers *why* their contribution is needed by the deadline.
* Monitor the comments during the review process and resolve them, if possible.
* To avoid too many edits at once, limit access to the document when necessary. Lock track changes and prevent people from accepting or rejecting changes, as appropriate.
* Schedule working meetings with writers and/or decision-makers at key points in the collaborative authoring process.
* Prepare an agenda for an adjudication meeting and, when possible, send it to the group ahead of time. *Never* have this meeting before reviewing the full comment file. Always have a clear goal for the meeting and be prepared to lead the discussion.

Overall, this session showed that medical writers can augment the benefits of collaborative authoring by using their skills to guide this process. Thank you, Meagan, for a wonderful session that showed how medical writers can use the provided framework to optimize collaborative authoring.

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