Selecting a solution provider to implement GS1 standards

Suggested questions for discussion and use by healthcare providers

Introduction

Healthcare providers around the world have a common need: ensure high-quality patient care while working within time and resource constraints. The use of GS1 identifiers, barcodes and other GS1 standards is quickly becoming a strategic priority for many healthcare providers to enable the automation of manual processes for increased efficiency, accuracy and safer processes.

With a recognised need for GS1 standards, healthcare providers are calling on solution providers for support and expertise to drive faster and better implementations.

To foster a successful partnership with a solution provider, a healthcare provider must clearly communicate its requirements and set clear expectations. Part of this process also involves learning more about the solution provider under consideration, how to interpret the solution provider's responses to requests for information, and assess if the solution provider can really deliver what it claims.

Following is a two-part series of suggested questions that will help you, as a healthcare provider:

A. Prepare the solution provider. Communicate your needs, priorities and return-on-investment (ROI) expectations for GS1 standards-based solutions.

B. Learn about the solution provider. Uncover and explore the solution provider's knowledge and experience with GS1 standards, successful implementations and the products and services it offers.

In short, these initial questions (and ultimately their answers) will help you create a potential partnership with a solution provider. They can aid your decision when selecting a solution provider partner and help you determine if a solution provider is the "best" choice for your organisation when implementing GS1 standards.

Please note:
While it is recognised that the following questions will not cover every possible implementation scenario, they do provide a framework and foundation from which you can formulate additional questions to fit your needs.

It should also be noted that not every question is relevant for a particular implementation project; therefore, questions should be selected to best fit the needs of the implementation.

With a recognised need for GS1 standards, healthcare providers are calling on solution providers for support and expertise to drive faster and better implementations.

Prepare the solution provider.

The following set of questions has been structured to provide solution providers with a broad view of your organisation's needs and environment and then, a more detailed description of potential solutions. By sharing this information, this will help solution providers better respond to requests for information (RFI), requests for tender (RFT) or requests for proposal (RFP) and, in the end, lead to a successful implementation.

A. Needs, priorities and targeted outcomes

1. Communicate the specific workflows/ processes in your environment that you would like to change and improve using GS1 standards.

✅ Be as specific and inclusive as possible. This will enable the solution provider to create and deliver a more detailed and complete response. In turn, you can better determine if the proposed solution is right for your environment, strategy and budget.

2. Prioritise your specific workflows/processes by grouping or "scoring" them based on the following:
- Mandatory: pending regulatory compliance requirement; executive directive; strategic initiative.
- Highly desired: obvious ROI; significant, far-reaching anticipated benefits.
- Nice to have: ROI must be proven; anticipated benefits.

For each, include the desired timeline for completion; examples include:
- Need to expedite
- Within 12 months
- 1 to 5 years

✅ By providing this information, you are taking the needed time to assess your issues and needs as well as their impact on your operational environment.

Prioritising your needs is especially important since you will most likely want to take a phased approach when implementing GS1 standards. A prioritised list provides the solution provider with invaluable information and direction about how to structure a multi-phased implementation.

3. Communicate the specific pain points that you would like to solve and then, explore solutions to the pain points. It's important to make sure that you search for a solution from a "day-in-a-life" standpoint—to fully understand the right kind of solution that would fit in your hospital's daily operations.

✅ With this step, you are adding more detail about the challenges and pain points associated with your list of prioritised areas and/ or processes. You are assessing how current processes are negatively impacting your staff, efficiencies, costs and even patients—and how these pain points might be resolved. With this added assessment, you may decide to re-prioritise your areas of need and timelines. (See #2.)

4. Provide information related to the scope of your requirements (e.g., product marking, capture, sharing, reporting) and your priorities and timelines.

✅ Here you are providing more information about specific aspects of the business processes in which your organisation intends to implement GS1 standards. This is basically an expansion of the content of the response. For example, do you envision implementing barcode scanning? Will you need to apply barcodes in the hospital? Will there be a requirement to collect product master data from suppliers?

5. Communicate information about dependencies and limitations of other systems and processes that should be considered.

Be sure to centre on the specific systems that currently support your prioritised list of areas/processes. You should advise if there are legacy systems that can't be changed, or IT security structures that need to be addressed. Consider the integration of existing IT systems and previous integration experiences in that space. If you are currently using a manual approach, you should also note this as an opportunity for automation.

6. Address the potential impact of cultural change and the willingness of staff to embrace change in your hospital operations.

Implementing GS1 standards and IT systems in your existing environment introduces significant change and the need for change management. By introducing this, the solution provider can advise how it can use its knowledge, experience and training/education to help drive effective and smooth change within your environment.

Illustrative approach to prioritising implementation projects
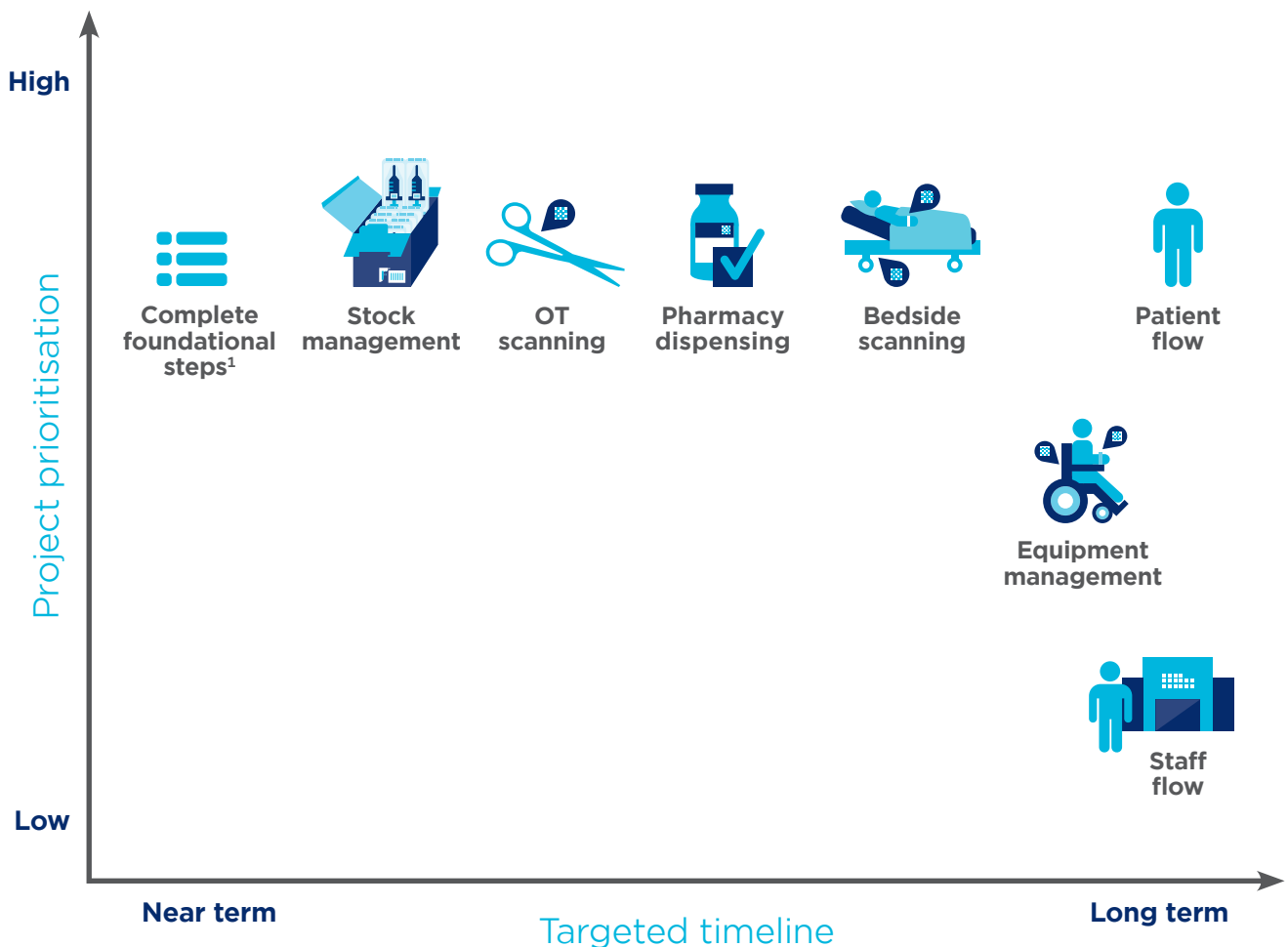
Foundation steps include:
(1) Source accurate and complete product data for relevant catalogues.
(2) Put in place master data management and internal data sharing process.
(3) Implement location identification and management.
(4) Agree upon standards for patient and caregiver identification.

B. About investment, returns and dependencies

1. Share how you will measure the "success" of an implementation.

✅ This provides the solution provider with your desired outcomes from the implementation; for example, expected improvements in patient safety, staff productivity and satisfaction levels, and costs.

2. Clearly articulate how you will measure the "return" on your investment in the solution—the measurements of success—and the expected tangible results.

✅ Define the measurements of success and establish a pre-implementation baseline of the current process, using the measurements. Plan to monitor and measure the results of the new process, post-implementation.

For example, improved patient safety can be measured as the "number of medication errors" in a specified timeframe. Your expected tangible result could be a "50% reduction in the number of medication errors."

3. Be clear about whether budget has been set aside and how much. What other budget allocations have been created, e.g., for internal staff training, IT acquisition, other areas? The policies of your organisation will determine how much information can be shared regarding budget, and at which stage in the process.

✅ Keep in mind that by understanding your targeted level of investment, the solution provider can more precisely address the level of services provided. They will be able to provide feedback on whether budget allocated is sufficient to achieve your list of priorities and expected results. The solution provider can also address how the budget might be better allocated for certain activities—perhaps areas of need that you had not considered.

4. If there are other projects within your organisation to which implementation of GS1 standards can be linked, it is important to include these. Also, consider if implementing GS1 standards can benefit multiple projects simultaneously.

✅ This may include IT projects and/or other change management projects that your organisation is currently working. For example, are you updating your ERP, EHR or EMR system? Are you implementing a new process within your care environment? This is intended to look for ways to integrate and streamline the implementation of GS1 standards into existing investments.

5. Consider your organisation's past experiences in implementing GS1 standards. Indicate the scope, nature and outcome.

✅ This provides the solution provider with an understanding of your current use of GS1 standards—the breadth and depth of how GS1 standards impact your current processes and any resulting benefits.

Learn about the solution provider.

With this series of questions, you have the opportunity to probe into the experience and expertise of a solution provider when providing implementation services for GS1 standards-based solutions.

A. Current knowledge of GS1 standards

1. **a)** What are the solution provider's lines of businesses?

b) What different business roles does the solution provider play?

c) Are any of its business roles and/or services contracted to be performed by other companies? If so, what percentage? How does the solution provider effectively manage contractors?

✓ If the solution provider provides services exclusively and/or contracts a percentage of its services via other companies, it is important to fully understand how the solution provider manages these contractors to ensure on time, on budget and highly satisfactory performance.

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2. **a)** How long has the solution provider been working with GS1 standards as part of its solutions?

b) On a scale from 1-5 (1= initial knowledge to 5 = in depth knowledge), how would the solution provider rate its company's level of knowledge about GS1 standards? Why?

✓ While this does not provide you with an entire picture of the company's experience, it is an effective place to start. It's interesting and can be somewhat revealing to request a self-assessment from the solution provider about their knowledge of GS1 standards. More importantly, it's important to probe for the reasons that they believe support this rating.

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3. What areas of implementing GS1 standards does the solution provider consider its company to be expert in and why?

✓ Look for and request that the solution provider give detailed answers about the areas and/or processes within a healthcare environment in which they claim to be experts.

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4. **a)** How does the solution provider engage with GS1 on a global and/or local level?

b) To what extent is the solution provider involved with GS1 standards and workgroups?

✓ If the solution provider engages with GS1 on a local level, the company will most likely be aware of the GS1 Member Organisations (MOs) with whom they work (https://www.gs1.org/healthcare/contact). They should be able to talk about the activities they undertake with those MOs as well as the staff with whom they interact—both at global and local levels.

Uncover the amount of time, extent of knowledge and types of activities that the solution provider has engaged in. Also, consider the level of involvement; for example, whether the solution provider has taken a leadership role in certain activities.

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5. **a)** Has the solution provider completed any local GS1 MO certification activities? If so, which ones?

b) Can the solution provider provide a reference name or other reference information?

✓ If a solution provider completes local GS1 MO certification activities, this demonstrates added effort and a layer of expertise. Are the areas of certification the same areas and/or processes that you have targeted for improvement with GS1 standards?

B. Knowledge of regulations and standard industry processes

1. **a)** How does the solution provider learn about relevant national and regional regulations?

b) How is this knowledge maintained and always up-to-date?

✓ Ask that the solution provider be as specific as possible in outlining its methodology for keeping abreast of the latest regulations impacting healthcare. Look for a systemic, ongoing approach where the solution provider takes a leadership role.

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2. Please provide an overview of the regulations that the solution provider believes are relevant to implementing GS1 standards in your environment and within the scope of the project.

✓ Consider the breadth and depth of the solution provider's answer. Have they listed all relevant regulations for your particular implementation?

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3. **a)** How does the solution provider work to address national and regional regulations and accurately summarise or represent them in an understandable message for customers?

b) Please provide details of the approach and an example implementation.

✓ More than any other question regarding regulations, this is perhaps the most important. While a solution provider may keep up-to-date regarding regulations, can they effectively translate and communicate, "what it means" to you and your GS1 standards implementation?

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4. What industry best practices should be part of the implementation? What is the source of these best practices?

✓ The solution provider should be able to provide published best practices associated with different types of GS1 standards implementations. Examples of best practices may include case studies, papers and articles, and presentations from conferences as well as reference materials from previous implementations.

C. Customer support

1. Provide details about the levels of pre- and after-sales support offered by the solution provider.

✓ Every implementation will most likely need some type of post-implementation support. The solution provider should be able to provide a list of its entire portfolio along with comprehensive descriptions of the services.

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2. How many people make-up the solution provider's support team? What are their roles and responsibilities?

✓ Determine if the solution provider offers an appropriate number of support personnel and mix of talent to support your ongoing needs.

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3. On a scale from 1-5 (1= initial knowledge to 5 = in depth knowledge), how would you rate the solution provider support team's level of knowledge about GS1 standards? Why?

✓ For the support function, you will need a team that is as knowledgeable (if not more so) than the implementation team.

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4. When is the customer support team available for support (days and hours)?

✓ Does the support team offer after hours and weekend support? If not, can arrangements be made for emergencies during these times?

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5. Do you have SLAs in place? If so, please describe them.

✓ The majority of solution providers have established service level agreements for their clients. Determine if SLAs can be put in place for your organisation.

D. Implementation expertise and experience

1. Approximately how many implementations in hospitals and retail pharmacies have the solution provider supported with GS1 standards? In what areas?

✅ Determine if the solution provider has had a sufficient amount of experience—not only in healthcare, but also in the specific areas of implementations.

2. a) What three hospitals (or retail pharmacies) has the solution provider recently worked with and which parts of the hospital have completed the implementation of GS1 standards that are now using the solution being offered?

b) What hospitals (or retail pharmacies) are willing to be reference sites?

✅ A solution provider ideally could have at least three references that are relevant for your implementation. Look for references that have implemented your specific, targeted area or process and that are willing to share background information and experiences.

Be sure to contact the references to ask questions about the solution provider's performance, any challenges and how they were overcome, and whether they would hire the solution provider again.

3. What did the solution provider learn from each implementation that it has applied or will apply to other implementations?

✅ Look for a solution provider that is constantly learning—one that recognises it does not "know everything"!

4. a) How does the solution provider demonstrate its overall team commitment to the implementation project?

b) What kinds of functional expertise does your company offer?

✅ Based on your prioritised list of areas and processes, request a list of solution provider team members who would be working on your implementation project, and the specific functions that each would be accountable for.

5. As part of the implementation process, does the solution provider offer training programs related to GS1 standards? If so, which ones?

✅ Ask about the specific training courses and opportunities offered by the solution provider that relate to your specific implementation project. Clarify the timing of the training, the total number trained, and opportunities for subsequent training and support after the initial training sessions.

6. What are the different requirements for GS1 standards implementation compared to other projects?

✅ Gather additional knowledge regarding the solution provider expertise relating to GS1 standards. It will also give information relating to overall implementation expertise.

E. Products and services offered

1. Your healthcare provider organisation would like to implement (insert description of implementation) and achieve (insert outcome). How can the solution provider's solution help achieve this?

✅ Based on your targeted objectives or outcomes (e.g., 50% reduction in medication errors), ask the solution provider how its GS1 standards-based solution will help achieve this outcome. Request that the solution provider describe in detail how the new process will work—how staff will work differently and better—and how systems will support this new environment.

2. What specific product and/or services does the solution provider provide that would help you successfully implement and integrate GS1 standards into your processes?

✅ Consider the range of services and products available to support your implementation and if there are any gaps that need to be addressed.

3. What makes the solution provider's solution different when compared to others that offer these types of products and services? What makes the solution unique, different and/or better than others?	✓ You are requesting that the solution provider provide you with its value proposition and the reasons why you should hire them above others available in the market. You should also uncover how the solution provider's solution is better for your implementation.
4. What are the solution provider's measurements of success related to GS1 standards for your specific products and services?	✓ Earlier you shared how you intend to measure the success of the implementation. Now, you need to determine how the solution provider recommends measuring the implementation's success. You can decide if the solution provider is prepared to demonstrate or prove that their solutions and products truly conform to and integrate GS1 standards.
5. Could the solution provider provide a full-scope "live" demonstration of the solution being offered?	✓ The solution provider should be able to demonstrate its solution for your specific prioritised needs—one that is operational. This should not be a "canned" PC-orchestrated demo, rather the solution truly working in a healthcare environment similar to yours.
6. How are the solutions offered interoperable with other hardware and software solutions used within the healthcare environment? Can a demonstration of interoperability with solutions (not produced by your company) be shown?	✓ Determine the level of interoperability provided by the solution provider. You will want to experience a demonstration of the interoperability—again, one that is operational.
7. What is the solution provider's approach to implementing a solution that is solving your specific business need and using GS1 standards? For example, does the solution provider recommend a phased approach? If so, why?	✓ If the solution provider recommends a phased approach, ask about the different phases and timing. Ask about sequence of steps— why certain steps and activities precede others.
8. Typically, what are the major milestones of an implementation project that include GS1 standards?	✓ You can get a sense of how the implementation will proceed and how your team and others in the healthcare environment may be impacted.
9. a) What has the solution provider found to be the most challenging aspects of any GS1 standards-related project? **b)** How does it pre-empt these potential challenges?	✓ These are excellent questions to determine if the solution provider has the needed experience to list the typical challenges associated with implementations, specifically your implementation project. You can better understand how the solution provider learns from its mistakes or the "bumps in the road" that typically accompany an implementation project.

Take steps today.

Selecting a solution provider that best meets your needs—now and in the future—is a critical part of your organisation's journey to successfully implement and use GS1 standards throughout your processes. We believe the questions and approach provided in this discussion guide will help you take the needed next steps on that journey.

About GS1 Healthcare

GS1 Healthcare is a global, voluntary user community bringing together all healthcare supply chain stakeholders, including manufacturers, distributors, healthcare providers, solution providers, regulatory bodies and industry associations. The mission of GS1 Healthcare is to lead the Healthcare sector to the successful development and implementation of global standards by bringing together experts in Healthcare to enhance patient safety and supply chain efficiencies. GS1 Healthcare members include over 100 leading Healthcare organisations worldwide.

For more information about GS1 Healthcare, please visit **www.gs1.org/healthcare**

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