

Inclusive Meeting Guide

For Small-Scale Meetings



We may attend meetings every day, but how often do we reconsider our meeting practices? Are we capitalizing on all of our opportunities to make our team, lab, or collaboration meetings more inclusive and effective? In this guide, we highlight actions that can make meetings more inclusive to all, especially to those from marginalized groups such as women and people with disabilities.

Before The Meeting

Assess accessibility

- Include a statement in the meeting invitation inviting attendees to request accommodations if needed
- If the meeting will include media such as presentations, PDFs, videos, or audio content, try to send the materials out in advance
- To learn more about accessibility for virtual meetings or for additional digital accessibility needs, visit Harvard's Digital Accessibility website.
- To learn more about etiquette and language, use this guide from the University of Pittsburgh.

Be intentional

- Proactively consider how diversity and power dynamics might effect attendee engagement
- Take stock of who is attending, and who is not. Are you missing people who could provide diverse perspectives on this topic, or who are directly affected by the discussion?
- Make sure the time and date of the meeting are during normal work hours and not during cultural or religious holidays
 - Meetings during normal work hours are especially helpful for attendees who are caregivers

Communicate expectations

- Make sure all attendees understand their role in promoting an inclusive and respectful environment
- Set standards about professional conduct and gender-inclusive, appropriate language
- Be clear about meeting roles ahead of time so attendees have time to prepare
 - Decide who will be in charge of note-taking and discussion facilitation
- Let attendees know expectations about engagement, including the use of video and chat features during virtual meetings

Craft an agenda

- Send out an agenda ahead of time. This can be very helpful for those who need extra time to prepare their thoughts and could lead to more engaging discussions during the meeting.
- Tips for creating an agenda include:
 - State the goal: What should participants think, do, or decide by the end of the meeting?
 - Post agenda items as questions: Questions help people prepare, make it easy to keep the discussion on track, and make it easier to determine when the discussion is complete.
 - Estimate timing: Allot a certain amount of time per question.
 - Encourage comments: Ask participants for feedback on the agenda before the meeting.

Questions to Consider

- How am I ensuring everyone has equal access to participate?
- What role could virtual features like chat boxes and breakout rooms serve in my meeting?

During The Meeting

Set the tone

- Remind everyone of the purpose of the meeting and the meeting's agenda
 - Using an agenda to guide the meeting can help provide focus to people with ADHD
- State expectations of behavior upfront
 - For example: no interrupting, mute yourself when not speaking, what is shared in the meeting stays in the meeting, and encourage alternate perspectives.
 - Ask attendees to use the "Raise hand" function during virtual meetings to reduce interruptions and allow everyone equal access to engagement
- Exhibit the same behaviors you expect from attendees

Share pronouns

- During introductions, ask attendees to include their pronouns, if they feel comfortable doing so. Be sure to model this behavior yourself.
- For virtual meetings, ask that people re-name themselves to include their pronouns following their last name, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Facilitate the conversation

- Ensure attendees speak one at a time
 - This is especially important for people who are hard-of-hearing
- Look out for conversation dominators.
 - If someone is controlling the dialogue, redirect the conversation back to the broader group.
 - Keep in mind that dominators may not just be one person, but rather a group of allies who share commonalities, such as gender or job seniority.
- If someone is interrupted, step in quickly. Use phrases like: “Before we move on, I want to hear more of what Jack has to say” or “Wait a minute – I want to make sure I understand Maria’s point before we add to it.”
- When someone makes a good point, acknowledge their contribution and give public attribution to their ideas.
- Be mindful of conformity bias, which occurs when people feel pressured to agree with everyone else in the room.

Check-in and recap

- Re-iterate the group's consensus and provide opportunities for attendees to voice agreement or concerns
 - This is helpful for people who are hard-of-hearing or who have a hard time focusing during discussions when multiple people are talking.
 - This also can help ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard

Manage time effectively

- Allow for some time to think and reflect
 - Some attendees may not feel comfortable sharing ideas right away, especially some introverts or neurodivergent people
- To avoid getting off topic, suggest that alternate topics be written down and placed in a virtual "parking lot" to be discussed at the end of the meeting if there is time.
 - This can help attendees who have trouble focusing and to avoid conversation dominators.

Provide multiple ways to engage

- Allow attendees to contribute in the way they feel most comfortable, such as:
 - Speaking up during the meeting independently
 - Being invited to speak during a planned pause at the end of a discussion point
 - Including text-based contributions added to the chat box of a video conference
 - Allowing contributors to send first and final thoughts via email before or after a meeting takes place

Questions to Consider

- What power dynamics are at play, and how might that affect engagement?
- What power do I hold, and what responsibility do I hold around intervening?

After The Meeting

Follow-up

- If possible, send a summary or meeting notes to attendees within one day
- Check-in with your attendees about tasks they were assigned during the meeting
- Ask attendees on their thoughts about how the meeting went and if they have any suggestions for future meetings

Reflect

- What went well? What could be better next time?
- What could I practice or model at the next meeting?
- What do I need to learn more about?

References

1. Quiet Revolutions. [Inclusive Meetings Checklist](#). 2018.
2. Pendergrass, et al. [Inclusive Scientific Meetings: Where to Start](#). 2019.
3. Serrato Marks, Gabi. [How to Make Professional Conferences More Accessible for Disabled People: Guidance from Actual Disabled Scientists](#). Union of Concerned Scientists. 2018.
4. Heath, Kathryn and Wensil, Brenda F. [To Build an Inclusive Culture, Start with Inclusive Meetings](#). Harvard Business Review. 2019.
5. Cullinan, Renee. [Run Meetings That Are Fair to Introverts, Women, and Remote Workers](#). Harvard Business Review. 2016.
6. Harvard Title IX. [Lead Virtually](#). 2020.
7. Harvard Title IX. [Engage Virtually](#). 2020.



PLAN



INCLUDE



REFLECT