

How to Run Inclusive Meetings – Key Points

Science of Meetings

- Meetings are:
 - Where members come together to share their thoughts and ideas and make decisions.
 - Where the culture grows and takes shape.
 - A real-time indicator of the culture of an organization or a chapter.
 - A common place for DEI dynamics to play out.
 - A very tangible way to help make your chapter/organization more inclusive.
- Historically, traditional meetings are also where people who are able-bodied, extroverted, and quick with verbal processes do best. Traditional formats center and favor extroverted, neurotypical, and systematically dominant identities.
 - Introverts + remote attendees have biases working against them.
 - Minority groups may feel shut out from meetings—discomfort with speaking up, certain groups are more likely to be interrupted in group dialogues.
 - Only 35% of employees (members) feel consistently comfortable contributing in meetings – if you only have 5-10 members, that's only 2-3 people who feel empowered to contribute.
- Inclusive meetings:
 - Allow diverse contributors to have an equal impact and contribute in the way that is meaningful for them.
 - Allow participants to feel energized, connected, and motivated to get work done.
 - Allow participants to feel listened to, valued, and understood.
 - Are *well-facilitated* – you have provided members with the necessary resources, information, and support for them to achieve the group's goals.
- Inclusive meetings are when a diverse group of people feel seen, represented, respected, and valued as they work together to come up with solutions and decisions.

Before the Meeting

- Create a sense of psychological safety before the meeting even begins. This encourages engagement and allows members to speak up, share their ideas, and take risks.
 - Send a pre-meeting e-mail inviting people to come.
 - Use inclusionary language that sets the stage and welcomes members:
 - Invite people to be “ready to share as well as listen.”
 - Clearly state that different perspectives are encouraged and valued.
 - See who is attending the meetings—are you missing people who are representative of your membership or have diverse points of view?
- Build the agenda collaboratively:
 - Send out the meeting agenda ahead of time so members can prepare their thoughts and ideas to share at the meeting.
 - Ask members for their input on anything that needs to be added to the agenda.
- If you're having an in-person meeting, make sure the seating accommodates everyone.
- If you're having hybrid meetings, make sure you provide access information in a timely manner.
- Understand what members need for them to benefit from the meeting.

During the Meeting

- Set the tone for the meeting:
 - Have a goal to create an open and inclusive space where everyone feels safe, seen, heard, and respected.
 - “Let's agree to be open to new ideas and express any disagreement respectfully.”
- Welcome people by name—practice gracious authority. Introduce them to other members of the chapter.
- Include everyone at the start—consider a check-in round where you open the meeting with getting the attendees to think about a thought-provoking question and then offer the opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Create a Chapter Agreement: These are a set of basic ground rules for everyone in the chapter to follow.
 - Set expectations for appropriate, respectful, and inclusive behavior upfront. Set clear guidelines for what is acceptable and what is not.
 - Establish clear ground rules that foster inclusion at the beginning of the meeting and stick to them—e.g., how the group will handle members interrupting each other.
 - Be clear and transparent about how inclusivity is defined and what it looks like in meetings.
 - Be clear and state goal of inclusivity for your remote participants.
 - Make sure these expectations are clear and visible to all.
- Manage conduct during the meeting:
 - Step in if interruptions are made or strong personalities overreach. If someone is interrupted, give them back the floor.

- Be aware of dominators in the conversation—don't be afraid to cut people off if they're speaking for too long in a polite manner.
- Mediate and facilitate:
 - Invite solutions from members instead of coming up with them yourself.
 - Ask questions instead of answering them.
 - If multiple people are offering ideas/feedback, allow them to speak in a designated order.
 - Facilitate a space where members have opportunities to speak up and feel comfortable sharing ideas.
- Amplify member voices:
 - Actively and intentionally bring all voices to the conversation and solicit ideas and feedback from all.
 - If someone hasn't spoken, ask them what they think—let them know ahead of time they will be asked for their feedback so they can mentally prepare.
 - Recognize that members do not all learn or process information the same way—take this into consideration when presenting information, making announcements, or addressing issues.
- Provide more than one way for people to contribute and share their feedback, thoughts, and ideas.
 - Make members aware that there are different ways they can contribute to the meeting.
 - Touch base with people who did not speak up and individually solicit feedback from them afterwards.
- Be fully engaged and present during the meetings—phones down, heads up!
- Model the behaviors you expect members to demonstrate. Practice self-awareness. Hold each other accountable.
 - Be aware of body language.
 - Minimize behaviors or biases that may prevent people from wanting to participate.
 - Be intentional about the mindset, behavior, and cues you embody to illustrate the cultural norm.
- For hybrid or virtual meetings:
 - Use technology to your advantage.
 - Have an assigned person for virtual attendees to reach out to and speak out on behalf of them.
 - Encourage the use of the chat feature or Q&A features on online platforms—have someone facilitate and monitor these.
- Consider the use of digital-friendly tools, audio, and visuals.
 - Use well-organized, “brain-friendly” slide decks and presentations that are accessible, easy to read, and easy to follow.

After the Meeting

- Send a meeting recap. Share notes, meeting minutes, action items, and presentations.
- Ask for additional thoughts or ideas after the meeting.
- Ask for feedback on how the meeting went so you can improve it for next time.
 - How useful was this meeting for you?
 - Do you have any suggestions or comments as to how to improve these meetings?
 - Is there anything you wish to see more/less in these meetings? Talk about more/less in these meetings?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how empowered do you feel to share your thoughts and ideas during the meetings?
- Ask if there was anyone that wasn't there at the meeting that should be included in the future.
- Keep meeting content organized for everyone to easily access—make sure they can find the information.

General Tips

- Create a checklist to make sure you are leading an inclusive meeting.
- Commit to inclusionary practices—be active and intentional in practicing inclusion.
- Understand the group dynamics within your chapter—alpha individuals, “in-crowd,” etc.
- Practice active listening—don't interpret silence as a lack of support or ideas.
- Be aware of microaggressions (e.g., gendered, language, gaslighting).
- Collect data! This helps chapter leaders develop inclusion strategies and have a better understanding of how effective their approaches are. This also helps leaders to better understand how participants feel about the meetings and if the content meets their needs.
- Remember, just because your team is diverse, doesn't mean all your team members feel *included*.

Commonly Used Terms

- Psychological Safety – Shared belief that it is safe for members to take personal risks without fear or negative consequences to one's self-image, status, or career.
- Facilitator – Person or thing that makes an action or process easy or easier.

Resources

- Harvard University, Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging – [Inclusive Meeting Guide](#)
- University of Queensland – [UQ Guide to Inclusive Meetings and Committees](#)
- [Atlassian Playbook](#)
- [Understanding Your Own Biases During Meetings](#)

References

- [Harvard Business Review](#)
- [Forbes](#)
- [Think with Google](#)
- [People Managing People](#)
- [Workshopper](#)
- [Hypercontext](#)
- [Pulsely](#)
- [The Digital Workplace](#)