Inclusive Meeting Guide

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.

Before The Meeting

Assess Accessibility

- Include a statement in the meeting invitation inviting attendees to request accommodations if needed
- Consider sending meeting materials in advance
- Learn more about virtual and in person accessibility by visiting Harvard's Digital Accessibility website and Accessible Event Planning website.
- Learn more about etiquette and language using this guide and this website.

Be Intentional

- Proactively consider how diversity and power dynamics might affect 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
- Inform attendees about expectations regarding engagement, including the use of video and chat features during virtual meetings.

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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

1. How am I ensuring everyone has equal access to participate?
2. 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 meeting's purpose and 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
- Model the behaviors you expect from attendees
  - Try using inclusive, gender-neutral language. Learn more about specific terms here.
- If this is a group that meets regularly, check in on how people are doing.
  - For example, at the start of a virtual meeting, ask how the group feels about having cameras on or off.

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Share Pronouns

- During introductions, ask attendees to include their pronouns, if they feel comfortable doing so.
- Show attendees how to include their pronouns in Zoom, and encourage everyone to make this change if they feel comfortable doing so.
- Learn more about pronouns <u>here</u>.

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."
- Amplify the voices of others by acknowledging their contributions and giving public attribution to their ideas.
- Be mindful of conformity bias, which occurs when people feel pressured to agree with everyone else in the room.
  - Consider asking the group for differing view points.

Provide Multiple Ways to Engage

- Allow attendees to contribute in the way they feel most comfortable.
  - 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

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.

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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

Questions to Consider

1. What power dynamics are at play, and how might that affect attendee engagement?
2. 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

Reflection

- 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

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