



How to...

Run effective team meetings

Meetings are a key part of working with any team. Well-run meetings can make the difference between a team that is cohesive, effective and successful and one that is unable to get a project off the ground. If you don't have effective meetings, team members may not think it is worth their time to show up and it will be hard to gain momentum. Organizing, facilitating and participating in successful team meetings are skills you may not have been exposed to outside of change-making, but they can be learned. This guide will explain every step.

Table of contents

1. Organizing meeting logistics	2
2. Setting the purpose and outcomes	4
3. Writing an organized agenda	6
4. Facilitating the meeting	8
5. Identifying, sharing and completing tasks	10
6. Cultivating team culture in meetings	14

1. Organizing meeting logistics

To run a meeting, you need to schedule a time, find a location and remind people to come.

1.1 TIME

A significant amount of organizing consists of scheduling meetings. It takes much more time than you might expect. Here are some best practices to be as efficient as possible:

- Set up a consistent meeting schedule as soon as possible, after deciding how frequently you need to meet (twice a week, every week, every two weeks, once a month...). Avoid at all costs the need to figure out a new meeting time every week or two!
 - Having a predictable, consistent meeting schedule allows people to plan other things around the meeting time.

1.2 LOCATION

- Meet in person if possible. It is more difficult to have a productive video call conversation, and you will not be able to develop the same level of trust and relationships. However, be sure to follow pandemic-safe protocols.
- If you are able to meet in person safely and in compliance with guidelines, aim to have a consistent meeting location. Finding a new meeting location every week is extremely challenging. Ideas for where to meet:
 - A team member's house
 - Public park
 - Coffee shop
- It's important that your meetings are accessible and inclusive for everyone on your team. Every access need is worth accommodating.
 - Consider the physical access needs of your team members, and choose a location that works for everyone. For example, is the space wheelchair accessible? Is the seating appropriate for everyone? Are there too many stairs? Are there bathrooms nearby (and are they gender-inclusive)? Do your team meetings need to be a scent-free zone? Are you able to provide water and snacks that are suitable for everyone's diet? [Check out this template for some other considerations.](#)

- Make sure everyone on your team can travel to your meeting location. Ideally, there will be transit nearby and everyone should feel safe in the area. If your membership is geographically dispersed, this may mean switching up your meeting location to include different neighbourhoods.
- Ensure it is clear that team members are not all obligated to purchase food/drinks if you're meeting at a coffee shop, since this can pose a financial barrier. It's usually all right for a group to sit in the shop if at least a couple of people have purchased something.
- Think about (and discuss with your team) other barriers to attending meetings. Do team members have varying work and school schedules that you could better accommodate? Does anyone have child-care responsibilities that you could help to address as a group (e.g., child-friendly meetings, or arranging shared child care for multiple group members to minimize cost)?
- Write up brief access notes for your meeting venue so your team members know what to expect, and share them in advance via the meeting invite. [Check out this template for suggestions of what to include.](#)

1.3 REMINDERS

You also need to make sure people will remember to come to the meeting!

- One very effective system to set up is a shared Google calendar. [Here is a step-by-step guide](#) about how to do this. (It's easy!) If you do, a norm your team could establish is that every meeting must go into the shared Google calendar. This gives team members no excuse to forget that a meeting is happening.
- Before any meeting, send reminders into your group chat/Slack channel. A good guideline for in-person meetings is to send one reminder two days before and one a couple of hours before the meeting. For video calls, try sending a reminder 24 hours before, one hour before and when the call is starting.
- Until your team gets into the groove of regular meetings, it's also ideal if the facilitator can message a meeting reminder to each team member individually. Alternatively, you can encourage a norm of team members organically messaging reminders to their friends.

- If you are recruiting new members to come to a meeting, you shouldn't expect them to remember when it is. You need to send them multiple reminders. You can read more about systems to do this in the Recruitment guide.

2. Setting the purpose and outcomes

2.1 POP MODEL INTRODUCTION

To plan an effective meeting, use the POP method by asking yourself these questions:

- Purpose: Why is this meeting important?
- Outcomes: What do we want to achieve?
- Process: How do we get there?

You can read [this handout](#) for more information about what the POP model is and why to use it.

2.2 PURPOSE

For the meeting to be an effective use of everyone's time, each team member must have a well-defined idea of what they are trying to accomplish. Avoid falling into the trap of scrambling to write an agenda a couple of minutes or hours before a scheduled meeting.

It's a good idea to clearly define the purpose(s) of your meetings. It's normal for a meeting to have multiple purposes.

Examples of meeting purposes

Note: These are general examples; the key to useful meeting purposes is to ensure they are very specific. For example: What is the exact decision you need to make? What is the knowledge that needs to be shared? etc.

- To make a specific, important decision
- To define your team's purpose

- To share knowledge that individuals have been researching
- To update a bigger group on what individuals/sub-teams have been working on
- To brainstorm for or plan a campaign or project
- To learn together, acquire training and practise skills
- To build and strengthen team relationships (bonding!)
- To debrief an event/campaign/activity
- To check in on and re-establish shared purpose

2.3 OUTCOMES

The next step is to turn your purpose statements into outcomes. These aim to outline what you want to accomplish by the end of your meeting.

Examples of meeting outcomes

Note: As with the meeting purposes, these are general examples; the key to useful meeting outcomes is ensuring they are very specific. By the end of the meeting, you should know exactly whether or not you achieved that outcome. For example: What is the exact decision you need to make? What is the knowledge that needs to be shared? etc.

- A decision on...
- A list of ideas for...
- [xxx] event scheduled
- A plan to complete...

3. Writing an organized agenda

How do you make your purpose and outcomes happen effectively? That is the goal of writing and following an organized, well-thought-out agenda.

You should avoid running a team meeting without an agenda; it risks wasting your team members' time.

3.1 WHO WRITES THE AGENDA?

Since the agenda describes the focus and schedule for the meeting — and by extension, your team's priorities — it is important that all team members have input on what it includes.

- However, there should be a clear “agenda-writer” role: one or two team members responsible for making sure that purpose, outcomes and process are defined and thought through. Otherwise, your agenda could be unorganized and not an efficient use of everyone's time.
- Two people should hold the agenda-writer role and work together to guide the process of creating the agenda. Often, it works best if at least one of those people is also facilitating the meeting.
- The people holding the agenda-writer role could rotate either every meeting or every couple of meetings, allowing all team members to develop their agenda-writing and facilitation skills and to help guide the team's direction.
- Make sure team members know how they can add items to the agenda (e.g., by contacting the person writing the agenda).
- A few days before the meeting, the agenda-writers should send a draft agenda to the group chat/Slack channel and ask for feedback. Anyone should be able to add their ideas.
- At the end of every meeting, take five minutes to brainstorm purpose/outcomes/agenda items for the next meeting. The agenda-writers for that meeting will work from these ideas.
- The agenda should be done a day or two in advance of the meeting, so team members have time to review it and consider their ideas ahead of time. (This is a hard norm to implement, but meetings are much more effective and efficient if everyone has already thought through the points.)

3.2 SECTIONS OF THE AGENDA

Elements of the meeting intro:

- Consider starting with a territory acknowledgement. For further guidance on this, please see our guide on [How to acknowledge Indigenous territory](#).
- Include a check-in (see Cultivating Team Culture in Meetings section below).
- At the beginning of the meeting, include a brief review of the agenda so people know what to expect. Make it short and energetic!
 - Reiterate the purpose and outcomes for the meeting so that all team members have a unified understanding of what needs to happen. This allows the facilitator to remind the team of the purpose of the meeting if someone tries to take the conversation in a different direction.
 - If people didn't review the agenda ahead of time, you can ask during this preview if they have anything they want to add to it. Doing this helps break down the dynamic of the facilitator dictating the meeting, and gives every participant buy-in to what is being discussed.
- Ask people to volunteer for meeting roles:
 - **Note-taker:** This is essential. It's very important to have clear, useful notes from the meeting to inform members who were absent and to refer to later. [Check out this guide](#) for more tips about how to do this most effectively.
 - **Time-tracker:** Sets a timer for each discussion section of the agenda and tells the group when they are nearing the end of the time.
- If you have new people, make sure to add time for icebreakers!

The main part of the agenda is when you accomplish the outcomes of your meeting. This could include:

- Review tasks for any current projects/campaigns
 - Check in with people who have taken things on
 - Confirm agreed-upon deadlines

- Invite new/uninvolved members to take on small/easier tasks (e.g., bringing snacks, joining a working group) that give them some responsibility.
- Talk through the big picture of any ongoing/upcoming projects/events.
- Sometimes, meetings can include opportunities to build team members' skills. Here are some examples of [skill-building exercises](#) (scroll to page 2).

End:

- Try setting the purpose and outcome for the next meeting at the end of or during your current meeting, so the whole team has input.
- To provide closure for the group, it is a good idea to try to end with a quick “check-out.” See Cultivating Team Culture in Meetings section below for more information.

4. Facilitating the meeting

Facilitation is the art of making it easier for people to work together. It is arguably the most important part of working as a group. It is also a challenging skill that most people have not been exposed to.

Good facilitation should be much more than just reading through the points on the agenda and asking people to discuss. The goal of good facilitation is to help a group understand common objectives, make democratic decisions and develop strategic plans. Underscoring the practice of facilitation is a deep belief that communities possess powerful inherent knowledge, skills, intelligence and problem-solving capacity that often make them more adept and resilient when pursuing goals than individuals working on their own. Approach facilitating big decisions like you would if you were helping a friend work through a tough time/big decision: offer quality listening, provide structure and letting them come to their own conclusions.

Here are some useful facilitation resources to help you:

- [A comprehensive guide](#) by Force of Nature
- [Useful general tips](#) from Sunrise Movement
- [Advice specifically about facilitating teams through making decisions](#) from 350.org

4.1 COVID-19: FACILITATING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Facilitating a video call is different than facilitating an in-person meeting. It's harder to gauge and respond to the energy level in the "room," and it's harder to determine who's going to speak next. Zoom meetings can easily lose some of the important sense of community that being together in a room creates, becoming little more than a recitation of impersonal updates. To prevent this, here are some norms for a successful Zoom call. The facilitator should go over these at the beginning of any Zoom meeting.

- Generally, people should mute themselves if they're not talking to cut down on background noise. However, if you have a small group, it can feel more participatory to keep everyone off mute.
- Ideally, everyone should keep their video on. However, it's also important to understand that some people may have access needs that make doing so uncomfortable or impossible, so be flexible!
- It's easy to get distracted when you're alone in your room talking to a computer. Encourage team members to close other tabs on their computers and put their phones away. (Tip: knitting/crafting is a good way to keep your hands away from devices!)
- The "chat" is a useful tool. If one person is talking or presenting something, other team members can ask questions in it.
- To replace raising hands and keep track of who's talking next, keep "stack" by using these symbols in the chat:
 - * in the chat to make a point
 - ** in the chat to make a direct response to what someone has just said (jumps to head of queue — use this sparingly!)
 - ++ for agreement (or, do jazz hands!)

Especially when many people are attending a meeting, it can be helpful to have one person facilitating the conversation and one in charge of keeping track of the speaking queue.

- Remember to still include energizers/breaks! It's exhausting to look at a screen for more than one to 1.5 hours.
- If you have a bigger group, split into breakout rooms to discuss things — especially before making decisions.

→ Check out [this guide from Our Time](#) for more tips and suggestions about running a virtual meeting.

5. Identifying, sharing and completing tasks

5.1 ACTION ITEMS

It is important to have meetings full of idea generation and planning. However, your team will only progress in its work by acting on ideas beyond the meeting times. Throughout your meeting, you should **always end every section of the agenda with clear action items**.

It's important to learn to call action items out as they come up, and to identify when one should be called. Otherwise, important work will fall to the side.

At the end of any conversation, the facilitator (or any team member) must:

- propose action items and a deadline for each action item.
- make sure all these action items get written in the notes.
- make sure someone commits to doing them!

5.2 SHARING WORK

Assigning action items means distributing the team's work; it's important to do this process carefully to avoid unequal work distribution.

Here is some more information about how to practise equity and inclusion through your work distribution practices:

<p>Equal and Equitable Opportunities</p>	<p>Everyone should have equal opportunities to join the team and be involved in tasks regardless of their background, identity, time commitment and experience level. Don't assume what others want as their tasks, roles and involvement, and instead listen to what they want to achieve with their experience.</p> <p>It can be hard for many individuals to self-identify as leaders and step into roles when asked in a team meeting. It is important to intentionally encourage leadership, especially among people from marginalized and disinvested groups. Being surrounded by and socialized into the values of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism and ableism makes it easy to internalize these values, even though they are harmful. For this reason, people of colour, women, trans and gender non-conforming people, people living in poverty, disabled people and other marginalized people may not be the first to volunteer for leadership roles because they are structurally discouraged from taking positions of power.</p> <p>Leadership takes on many forms, so ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to learn, grow and develop into roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>To encourage new people to take on leadership roles, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship: working in teams or pairs, experienced leaders hold back and make space for potential leaders to ask the group or individuals for assistance and feedback. • Skill-building or training on key skills. • Rotation of tasks.
<p>Share the Work</p>	<p>Sometimes it can feel easier to take work on ourselves, because we know we can do it well, are passionate about the task or assume that others won't do it as well. Sharing the work is important for many reasons. When we erase our assumptions and advocate for others to access their potential, by trusting them to take work on, we create an inclusive team culture where others can build their skills and take on meaningful pieces of work. We also unlock hidden</p>

	<p>potential to accomplish more than our assumptions could have predicted. We also protect ourselves from burnout by handing off tasks to others. Our change-making work is not meant to be done by one or two people; it must be shared at every step. Change-making must embody collective effort, as we challenge the culture of individualism that is connected to so many social and environmental problems.</p>
Willingness to Make Space	<p>When we are passionate about our work, we are often eager to take on tasks or gain certain experiences. However, consider whether you hold any privileges that have given you more of these great opportunities than others in your group. An important part of being a leader is stepping back to create new and exciting opportunities for teammates who may not have had the same experience.</p>
Support Others to Succeed	<p>Because every person has their own unique situation, needs and capacities, not everyone can take on work in the same way. This doesn't mean they can't take it on at all; it just means you need to find a way to make it work for them and their circumstances. This starts with allowing others to tell you what works for them.</p> <p>Asking teammates if they want or need any support to take something on can empower them to do and learn from a task or experience they may otherwise not be able or comfortable to do. Support can take many shapes based on needs and might include things like accessibility to the internet or technology, assistance with language or communication barriers, emotional support, a partner for public presentations, public transit fare and more. Keep in mind, some teammates may need you to step up to offer assistance (but not assume what they need) so they feel supported before they are comfortable volunteering to take something on.</p>
Find Opportunities	<p>When dividing up big tasks or pieces of work, consider opportunities to give ownership to people who may be hesitant to step up. You might break up a task to intentionally involve someone, create a low-barrier (not difficult) task for someone new or less experienced, or if you notice not everyone has a piece, ask the group or individuals privately if there's any part of the work or other ideas they have and are willing to take on. This is a great way to keep everyone</p>

	<p>engaged and connected to the work and to integrate new folks to your team without overwhelming them. Keep in mind, some people are shy. If you notice some of your teammates did not volunteer for something, consider asking them in private if there’s anything they could imagine doing to help or any way you can help them take something on. They may be more comfortable communicating their needs and desires in a private space.</p>
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5.3 ACCOUNTABILITY

A strong team has a culture of defining work and sharing work — and also of doing the work they said they would! **Accountability** is crucial to a strong team.

Key attitudes for each team member to absorb:

- Each member’s contribution is important to the team’s success.
- One person’s inaction affects others: if someone doesn’t do their work, other people will have a hard time.
- Accountability requires self-awareness of your own capacity. Saying “no” is okay and encouraged. It’s better to be honest about not having the capacity to take on a task.
- Accountability is how a team builds trust.

Systems to support accountability:

- At the end of the meeting, you should make sure all the action items are listed in one place in the notes, and you should do a go-around where everyone says the action items they are going to do, and by when (this is a really good trick that ensures that team members are extremely clear about what tasks they are responsible for).
- After the meeting, the note-taker should send this list of action items to the group chat/Slack channel, making sure to tag the people who agreed to take on each action item. This reminds team members what they agreed to take on, and creates team accountability.
- You can also consider using a specific document- or a task-management app to keep track of action items.

6. Cultivating team culture in meetings

The structure and culture of your team meetings play a large role in determining the culture of your team. When you are planning and facilitating meetings, consider what culture you are creating.

Check-ins/-outs:

- People come to meetings with a lot of different things going on in the rest of their lives. It's important to start meetings with an acknowledgement of this.
- It can help the facilitator to hear how everyone is feeling coming into the meeting.
- Creative check-in questions allow you to get to know your teammates better!
 - Here is an online [check-in question generator](#) you can use to help you.

Other fun meeting ideas:

- For in-person meetings, always have food! Food brings people together and makes your meetings more accessible. Here are a couple of ways you could do this:
 - Set up a rotating snack sign-up — anyone who is able to signs up to bring snacks one week.
 - Buy snacks using a shared pool of money, to which team members can contribute as much or as little as they are able.
 - Ideally meet in a place where team members can make themselves tea.
- Ensure that the tone of the meeting is upbeat. Even when going through necessary but sometimes slightly dry or dull content (e.g., logistics), try to bring energy and positivity.
- Have dance parties sometimes!
- Try singing! Some teams in the U.S.-based Sunrise Movement start every meeting with a song. You can check out their [list of movement songs here](#).
- Try to come up with other fun traditions! For example, skill-share sessions, where team members can share a quick performance or teach the other team members a skill.