

LEVEL 3: INSTITUTIONAL

INCLUSIVE MEETING GUIDE

Level Up Your Meetings

PURPOSE

Inclusive meetings don't happen by accident. They are intentionally designed to support people with different backgrounds, communication styles, roles, identities, and access needs. This guide offers practical practices any team can adapt.

01 COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS (CREATE TOGETHER)

Community agreements are shared expectations for how the group will interact. They work best when the team creates or affirms them together.

HOW TO USE

- ◆ Introduce agreements at the start of a project, team formation, or recurring meeting.
- ◆ Invite additions or changes.
- ◆ Revisit periodically.

SAMPLE AGREEMENTS (ADAPT AS NEEDED)

- ◆ We do not interrupt one another.
- ◆ We listen to understand, not to respond.
- ◆ We challenge ideas, not people.

Note: Anyone can name when an agreement is missed and should be thanked for having the courage to name it. When someone speaks up, thank them directly: "Thank you for naming that. Let's reset."

02 BEFORE THE MEETING (DESIGN FOR INCLUSION)

Inclusion begins before people join the physical or virtual room.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

- ◆ Share an agenda in advance, including:
 - ◆ Purpose (Why are we meeting?)
 - ◆ Desired outcomes (What decisions or outputs are expected?)
 - ◆ Topics and time estimates
- ◆ Clarify expectations:
 - ◆ Is this informational, consultative, or a decision-making meeting?
- ◆ Provide context or pre-reads so participants who prefer time to think can arrive prepared.
- ◆ Invite access needs early (e.g., captions, materials in advance, sensory considerations).
- ◆ Design for access BEFORE needs arise on teams to build good habits.

03 DURING THE MEETING (PRACTICE INCLUSION IN REAL TIME)

HONOR THE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

- ◆ Reference them openly, both proactively and reactively when needed.

WHEN AN AGREEMENT IS MISSED (E.G. INTERRUPTION)

- ◆ Anyone may speak up.
- ◆ If no one does, the person with the most positional power in the room takes responsibility for resetting.

Example language: "Thank you for your input. I want to pause. [Name] wasn't finished speaking. Let's give them the floor again."

Expected response: "Thank you for letting me know. I'm sorry for interrupting." Then adjust behavior moving forward.

WHEN AN AGREEMENT IS MISSED (E.G. INTERRUPTION)

- ◆ Notice who has spoken and who hasn't and invite quieter voices without pressure.

Example language: "Are there voices we haven't heard yet who'd like to add anything? Passing is always okay."

ACKNOWLEDGE COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

- ◆ When someone shares a difficult perspective, names a missed agreement, or offers vulnerable feedback, acknowledge it directly: "Thank you for bringing that up. That took courage, and it helps us all."

04 STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE SPEAKING

Use structure to reduce dominance and increase participation. These structures take more time than open discussion, but they create space for contributions that would otherwise be lost.

- ◆ Roundtable / Round Robin – Each person has an uninterrupted opportunity to speak. Passing is allowed and respected.
- ◆ Pair and Share – Discuss in pairs before opening to the full group.
- ◆ Reflection Time – Build in 30 to 90 seconds of quiet thinking or note-taking before discussion.
- ◆ Written Input – Use chat, shared docs, or notes to collect ideas alongside verbal discussion.

05 AFTER THE MEETING (EXTEND PARTICIPATION)

Inclusion continues after the meeting ends.

DO THIS CONSISTENTLY

- ◆ Send notes promptly with:
 - ◆ Key takeaways
 - ◆ Decisions made
 - ◆ Clear action items (owner + timeline)
- ◆ Offer additional ways to contribute:
 - ◆ E.g. comments in a shared document
 - ◆ Provide a short, asynchronous feedback window for final contributions

- ◆ Name how additional input will be used
- ◆ **If asynchronous feedback shifts a decision, communicate the change and the reasoning to the full group.** This ensures people know their input mattered and prevents resentment when decisions evolve.

06 WHAT IF I MESS UP?

Facilitating inclusively is a practice. You will make mistakes. What matters is how you respond.

IF YOU CATCH YOURSELF

- ◆ Pause immediately
- ◆ Acknowledge what happened: "I just talked over you. I'm sorry."
- ◆ Restore the floor: "Please continue. I'm listening."

IF SOMEONE POINTS IT OUT

- ◆ Thank them: "Thank you for naming that."
- ◆ Apologize sincerely: "I'm sorry for interrupting."
- ◆ Adjust your behavior moving forward.

If the impact is more serious, additional repair may be required.

ANATOMY OF A GOOD APOLOGY

1. **Say "I'm sorry for..."** and name the specific behavior.
2. **Name the impact** of that behavior, if you understand it.
3. **If possible, name how you will repair the harm** (and follow through).
4. **Name how you will change your behavior going forward** (and follow through).
5. **Do not expect to be forgiven.** The person you harmed gets to decide how they respond.

Example: "I'm sorry for interrupting you during that discussion. That may have signaled your input wasn't valued, which wasn't my intent but I understand it may have been the impact. I'm going to be more intentional about noticing when I dominate a conversation, and I'll work on pausing before I speak. I appreciate your willingness to name what happened."