

# Inclusive Meetings Checklist

## BEFORE YOU MEET — FOR ORGANIZERS

### Your special purpose

Ask yourself, “What am I trying to accomplish?” Do you want to share information, generate ideas, discuss a problem, make a decision, or something else?

### To meet or not to meet

Is pulling people together the best way to accomplish your goal? Could you communicate in writing? Virtually? Or individually? Could you work independently, then share ideas later? A meeting should be a last resort, not the default.

### Short and sweet

How much time do you really need to accomplish your objective? Most people’s attention begins to wander around **18 to 20 minutes**.

### Structure the conversation

Take a few minutes to craft an agenda:

- *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.
- *Identify responsible parties:* Indicate who will lead the conversation for each question. It might all be you, but it is **often more effective to share meeting leadership**.
- *Estimate timing:* Allot a certain amount of time per question.
- *Encourage comments:* Ask participants for feedback on the agenda before the meeting.

### Pick your partners

Be selective—productivity goes down when the number of participants goes up.

### Set partners up for success

Is there anyone in particular who you would like to play a role or share thoughts in the meeting? Ask them in advance. Everyone—especially introverts—benefits from a little lead time to organize their thoughts.

### Invest in pre-work

What information do you need to share in advance to accomplish your goal? Send it out in advance, to let people read, think, and process on their own time. That way time together is spent actually engaging with the information.



**BEFORE YOU MEET — FOR PARTICIPANTS****Assert Your Rights**

You have a right to know what is expected of you before walking into a meeting. Next time a calendar invite hits your inbox, ask the meeting organizer, “What’s this all about?” before submitting your reply.

**Prepare proactively**

Spend some time—even if only a few minutes—thinking about what you want to say or contribute. You can even let the meeting organizer know that you have things to contribute on particular topics.

**Precondition**

Introverts prefer to have time to prepare for conversations, especially difficult or fraught ones. Rather than confronting your introverted colleague in the moment, ask via email if she can meet—and let her know what you want to discuss.

**Get focused**

Minimize distractions so you can give it your all during the meeting. This might mean leaving your smartphone behind, turning off your computer, or selecting your seat carefully.

**Own your style**

As an introvert, extrovert, or ambivert, think about how you can best contribute in a meeting. Talk to the meeting leader in advance and let them know how you would like to participate to be your best self.

**Be someone else’s champion**

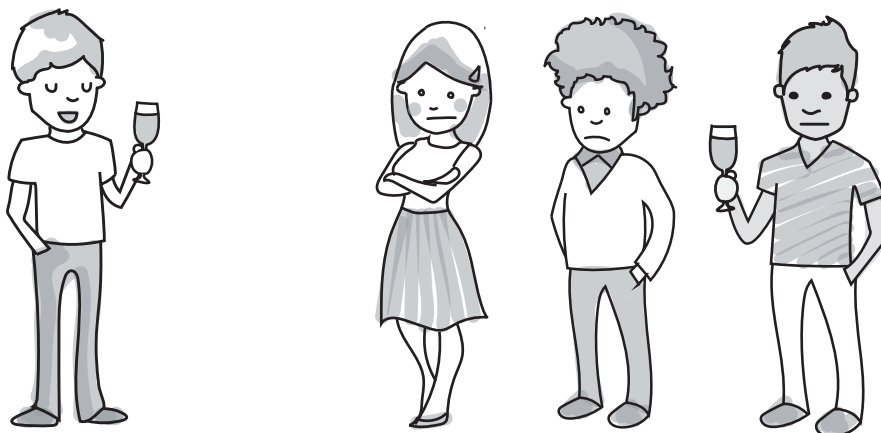
Advocating for ourselves and our ideas is often a particular challenge for introverts (and many women, too). One way to get your voice heard is to speak up on someone else’s behalf, to promote the opinions and ideas of someone you respect.

**Make needs explicit**

Extroverts usually prefer to talk in real-time and hash things out as quickly as possible. If you would prefer to communicate digitally, or meet and then follow-up after consideration, make it clear to your counterpart.

**Let it go**

Once an extrovert feels like a decision has been made, he often prefers to move on to the new task at hand—unlike introverts, who often continue mulling over conversations. Good partnership with extroverts often means trying to move on with them.



sarah has done a great job. to thank her, we're going to make her feel extremely awkward and uncomfortable

## WHEN YOU MEET — FOR ORGANIZERS

### Ground Rules

#### Small Talk Serves a Purpose

When you and your extroverted colleague are both the early birds to the meeting, take a minute to ask, “How’s your week going?” It’s a small gesture that can build the social bonds extroverts thrive on.

#### Take advantage of the sidelines

Introverts may not show their true awesome colors in a large group meeting. When there’s a break in the action, make an effort to connect with an introverted colleague one-on-one to ask what he thinks about the conversation. It’s a small gesture that plays to the introvert’s strengths in smaller group settings.

#### Respect people’s time

Start and end on time. No matter what.

#### End meetings when they end

If your goal has been accomplished, end your meeting there.

#### Ban multitasking

If you are meeting in person, ask people to put their cell phones in the middle of the table and to close their laptops. Meeting virtually? Turn on the video cameras to sustain attention and engagement.

### Getting Started

#### Start with the agenda

Spend the first minute or two reviewing the agenda and ask if anyone has anything to add. This helps everyone gets focused together.

#### Designate a “Yoda”

Your job as facilitator can make it difficult to be tuned into group dynamics. Author Keith Ferrazzi recommends designating a “Yoda” to be responsible for observing interactions and styles, and being candid about what is working and what is not.

#### How you begin the conversation matters—a lot

In the typical meeting, three people do 70% of the talking. Extroverts often establish themselves as the anchor early in a meeting, while introverts are silenced and struggle to steer the discussion in any other direction. Disrupt this pattern by taking a different approach to how the conversation begins:

- Ask participants to spend a few minutes writing their ideas and have the meeting organizer read them aloud.
- Have people talk in reverse order of seniority.
- Designate who will kick off a topic before the meeting begins.

### In the Flow

#### Table it

Keep your colleagues focused on what you agreed to accomplish, and when the conversation takes a tangent, gently steer it back on course. Assign an attendee to keep track of ideas that have been tabled until later, then get back to the business at hand.

#### Give “Time to Think”

For many of us (especially introverts), thinking is an internal process best suited to quiet moments. Try scattering a few minutes of silent reflection throughout the meeting.

**WHEN YOU MEET — FOR PARTICIPANTS****Speak up early**

Although it might sound daunting, research suggests that early talkers set the tone for a conversation. This is known as “anchoring”—the conversation quickly anchors around the first idea or opinion and flows from there.

**Give yourself three tokens**

If you're an extrovert, you're probably one of the people doing 70% of the talking in team meetings. One way to build in space for your introverted colleagues to catch up and join the conversation is to give yourself three metaphorical tokens. Each time you talk you use one of your tokens and when they're gone they're gone...so make every time count!

**Be inquisitive**

Posing a question can be just as valuable as making an assertion, and sometimes feels a little more natural.

**Interrupt the interrupters**

Interruptions happen at least once every three minutes. Extroverts are often cool interrupting and being interrupted, but introverts usually feel otherwise. When someone starts to interrupt, raise your hand to indicate that you are not done, and politely finish your thought at a slightly higher decibel level.

**Process out loud**

Extroverts can be left feeling in the dark while introverts process internally. Although it may be a stretch, make an effort to give a step-by-step explanation of your thinking.

**AFTER YOU MEET — FOR ORGANIZERS****Get real about what worked—and what didn't**

Meeting debriefs can provide clarity and set up the next meeting for success. Try completing the following statements:

- It was effective when...
- Next time let's try...

**Memory is fickle**

Within 24 hours of the meeting, distribute a bullet-point summary of the main topics covered, assigned tasks and timeframes, and any unfinished business that needs further discussion.

**Help me help you**

You can improve meeting outcomes by following up with people who were assigned action items—it can be as simple as a between-meeting email asking for a status update and offering support.

**Look ahead**

It is never too early to begin planning your next conversation. Did your meeting result in a new best practice you want to continue going forward? Did some people dominate the conversation while others sat back?

**AFTER YOU MEET — FOR PARTICIPANTS****Compare notes**

Look at the meeting summary when you get it, and compare it to your own notes. If you spot inconsistencies, follow up with the meeting organizer to clarify.

**Use solitude as a prelude**

If you're an introvert, you probably regain your energy best by being alone or in quiet situations. The first thing you want to do after that intense all-day meeting is to escape. Which is OK, but might not always be best for your relationships with extroverted team members who want to socialize. What if you excuse yourself for a brief period of time and when your energy levels are on the rise join the group for some team bonding?

**Find alternatives to happy hour**

If you're an extrovert, your favorite way to unwind and rejuvenate after an intense day might be inviting as many people as you can find to join you for happy hour. But to your introverted colleagues, happy hour is often a complete drain on their energy. What are some other ways you might energize together? Maybe a walk. Or a smaller group gathering over a meal? Get creative!

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