TOOL - FACILITATING INCLUSIVE MEETINGS

Normalize acknowledging participant needs by starting meetings with a discussion of proactive accessibility measures that have been provided. Explain how to enable captions and use the raise hand feature. Review the agenda, noting the time of any planned breaks. Encourage participants to share any issues that arise and give them the preferred way to do so. This can be done through chat or by contacting your access point person directly. Share the following guidelines:

- To avoid interruptions and unnecessary background noise, participants should use the hand raising feature for comments or questions and mute themselves when not speaking.
- All attendees should identify themselves by name each time they speak. This helps all participants follow along and enables sign language interpreters to easily identify the speaker.
- If there are blind participants who have requested audio description, explain and model brief self-description.
    - If you were arranging to meet a non-blind person in a public place who you have not met before, how would you describe yourself so that they could pick you out from the crowd?
    - Limit descriptions to three key elements and one or two sentences. Too much information can be overwhelming. More information about available from Vocal Eyes.
- When speaking, participants should turn on their cameras if they are comfortable doing so.

CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

Establishing and adhering to ground rules or working agreements is an effective way to shift the power dynamics of a group, making space for all voices to be heard. Such expectations set the tone of a meeting and let participants know how to engage. Revisiting expectations at the start of each meeting encourages participants to be mindful about the way their communication and interactions help create an equitable, inclusive space.

Ground rules are generally imposed on a group while working agreements are created and agreed upon by group members. Example expectations:

- Stay engaged
    - Pay full attention to the discussion.
    - Don't have side conversations or multitask when others are speaking.
    - Don't disengage from discussions when uncomfortable.

- Call people in instead of calling them out
    - Give yourself and others space to grow
    - Recognize that participants have different experiences and perspectives

- Come to the space teachable
    - o Listen for understanding, not response.
    - o Ask questions if you do not understand what someone else means.
    - o Honor the perspectives of other people.
    - o Focus on what you're learning, not what you already know.
    - o Avoid playing devil's advocate - devils don't need help.

- Being conscious of power and privilege
    - o Don't let people dominate discussions
    - o Call out interruptions so all perspectives can be heard
    - o Encourage all participants to share their thoughts, if they wish to do so
    - o Amplify the voices of people who are traditionally at the margins of discussions.

- Respect the speaker, even if you disagree with the idea.
    - o Listen to and respect other points of view.
    - o Strive to build community and establish trust.

Learn more: [Introduction to Community Agreements](#), [Create Working Agreements for Productive Discussions](#)

FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS

Intentional meeting facilitation is helpful when moderating discussions, keeping the meeting on track, and ensuring all participants have opportunities to contribute. Leaders can foster collaboration, respect participants' time, and drive meaningful outcomes by considering the following guidelines:

- Stick to the agenda, discussing one topic at a time.
- Avoid getting off topic.
- Be comfortable with pauses in the conversation. Attendees may have delays due to technology or require more time to process information.
- Encourage participation from everyone. Don't let people dominate discussions or interrupt others.
- Take time to consider new ways of thinking and unconventional approaches to addressing problems.
- Speak directly to participants even if interpreters or care attendants are present.
- Slow down. Allow ample time for unhurried communication.
- Provide opportunities for questions. Make sure that what you are communicating is understood before moving on to the next topic.

- Encourage participants to participate in the way they are most comfortable. (verbally or in writing).
- Give participants time to process before agreeing to a decision.

ACCESSIBLE PRESENTATIONS

In addition to creating accessible slides, presenters should be mindful of accessibility when speaking to an audience. The following guidelines foster inclusion and improve the clarity and effectiveness of the message being shared.

- Turn on your camera to assist people who are lip reading.
- Make sure you are well lit. Avoid distracting backgrounds.
- Only use captioned videos. Autogenerated captions must be edited for accuracy.
- If there are blind participants, identify an audio described version of any videos. If none exist, a volunteer can describe what is happening on screen.
- Avoid flashing lights.
- Speak clearly at a normal pace. If interpreters are being used, pause after lengthy or complex points to allow them to catch up.
- Use plain language. Define acronyms and industry jargon the first time you use them, e.g., Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR).
- Read all text on slides aloud.
- Briefly describe any images on slides.
- Provide opportunities for participants to ask questions. Pause to allow time to process information.
- Adjust the presentation pace based on audience needs.

FOLLOWING UP
- Send a summary, meeting notes, or recording of the meeting (if available)
- Follow-up with attendees about tasks they were assigned during the meeting.
- Send participants any links or resources that were shared in the meeting chat.
- Ask participants for ideas that might come to mind after the meeting. This allows people who take longer to process information (and introverts) the opportunity to participate. "Anyone have a new thoughts or insights about this situation since we met? If so, I'd love to hear them."
- Ensure feedback surveys are accessible.
- Ask questions about the accessibility of the meeting
- Reflect on what worked well, and what could be improved in the future.