Inclusive Meetings

What this is:
How to run inclusive meeting.

Why it matters?
Creating an environment that encourages diversity of opinion and participation of all attendees helps create an inclusive work environment, which improves morale and reduces turnover. The Solar Foundation found that morale and feelings of satisfaction in wage and career mobility is generally lower among women and people of color. This could be attributable to how meetings are structured. The Solar Foundation also found that companies pay between $10,000 - $50,000 per unfilled position in opportunity cost (not to mention the cost of having to retrain a replacement worker).

Example:
In an inclusive meeting everyone has a chance to contribute and all voices are heard. The facilitator helps people prepare by sharing the agenda in advance and takes care to minimize interruptions during the meeting, which results in a better outcome.
Before the meeting:

Your job prior to the meeting is to give underrepresented voices the opportunity to express opinions early on, keep the group lean and less intimidating, and provide time and headspace for all voices to be heard.

→ **Write a detailed meeting agenda and send it to all participants at least 24hrs in advance.**

    List agenda items as questions, not generic topics, and encourage participants to come prepared. This gives introverts a chance to process information outside of the pressure of a loud social setting.

→ **Be selective with meeting invitees.**

    The more people present, the harder for everyone to contribute. Only invite people who need to be there, while ensuring the invitees represent diverse perspectives, experience and knowledge. The agenda should help invitees ascertain whether they need to be at this meeting. Ensure invitees understand that if they aren't directly involved or don't feel they have something to contribute, they should decline the invite (and if necessary, direct you to anyone else who should be there).

→ **Budget enough time to cover everything on the agenda.**

    Time pressure makes meetings more efficient, but too much time pressure eclipses the opinions of less vocal participants. Ensure there's enough time for everyone to voice their opinions, build on others' opinions, and reach a conclusion together. Keep side conversations, especially around predominantly gendered activities (sports, spa day), to a minimum.

At the beginning of the meeting:

→ **Set clear ground rules at the beginning of the meeting.**

    Set a “not talking over each other rule” and encourage bystanders to speak up and “call out” interruptions.

→ **Review meeting roles and agenda.**

    Explain who’s in charge of each agenda item, who’s facilitating, and what the meeting goals are.
During the meeting:

→ **Get everyone involved.**
  If you notice the same people continually talking, encourage a “Step up, step back” approach where people who have talked a lot step back and people who haven’t contributed yet step up.

→ **Interrupt interruptions.**
  Lead by example and call out when you see someone interrupting someone else. Have phrases ready to use like “hang on a second - I want to make sure we understand Sam’s point before we add on to it.”

→ **Give credit where credit is due.**
  When someone makes a good point, acknowledge their contribution and give public attribution to their ideas.

→ **Write and share.**
  Give everyone time to process a question and write ideas down and then share. This gives less vocal participants time to gather their thoughts and ensure they’ve been heard.

→ **Wrap it up.**
  Review key points and decisions made and then clarify next steps.

Links to other resources:

- [How to Have More Inclusive Meetings over Zoom](https://www.ted.com/talks/how_to_host_a_more_inclusive_meeting) - Ted Ideas
- [How to Lead Inclusive Meetings](https://www.ddiworld.com/solutions/leading-effective-meetings) - DDI
- [To Build an Inclusive Culture, Start with Inclusive Meetings](https://hbr.org) - HBR