

 GLOBAL

# 5 ways to make your meetings more inclusive

Frances Armas-Edwards / June 2021



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A version of this tutorial originally appeared in [the free Primer app](#).

We've written previously about steps you can take to make your workplace more inclusive, such as [using precise language](#), [accounting for accessibility](#), and [building a culture of belonging remotely](#). Another very tangible way to make your business more inclusive is by learning how to run meetings in an intentionally inclusive way.

Meetings are where ideas are shared, decisions are made, and power dynamics play out. By taking time to ensure attendees feel comfortable and confident participating in meetings, you'll create a more inclusive environment and likely foster better ideas too. For example, in a [recent survey of senior executives by Forbes Insights](#), 48% strongly agreed and 37% somewhat agreed that a diverse, inclusive workforce offers the different perspectives a company needs to power its innovation strategy.

Here are five steps you can take to start making your meetings more intentionally inclusive.



**1**

Make it comfortable to take risks



**2**

Include everyone as you plan



**3**

Rotate roles every meeting



**4**

Ensure every voice is heard



**5**

Be transparent about how decisions are made

## 1. Make it comfortable to take risks

Consider who might feel especially uncomfortable being vulnerable in a meeting. This could be an introvert on a team of extroverts, a team member who identifies with an underrepresented group, or anyone who doesn't agree with the rest of the people in the meeting.

It's important to make everyone feel welcome from the beginning, so you might kick off your meeting by saying, "Let's agree to be open to new ideas and express any disagreement respectfully."

By encouraging diverse points of view, you'll also be welcoming debate. Remind your team to focus on the issues being discussed and use tools to evaluate the quality of contributions, like criteria for making hard decisions.

## 2. Include everyone as you plan

If everyone has a say in what gets discussed, it becomes everyone's meeting. And in these situations, it's helpful to solicit early input. Find out what others want to discuss and insert what you can into your meeting's agenda. Then, send out the agenda in advance, ideally at least 24 hours ahead of time, to give all participants adequate time to reflect, prepare, and possibly amend the proposed agenda items.

**Try to switch up your meeting times so that it's convenient for everyone at least some of the time**

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As you're planning, it's also critical to be mindful of attendees' time zones and personal commitments. If someone is unable to attend, for instance, be sure to share notes or a recording with them, so they're still able to provide input. And, to the extent that it's possible, try to switch up your meeting times so that it's convenient for everyone at least some of the time.

### 3. Rotate roles every meeting

Assigning roles like facilitator, timekeeper, and note taker will help your meetings run more smoothly. A great way to improve the inclusivity of this approach is by rotating these roles to proactively prevent common pitfalls, such as a senior leader always acting as facilitator or the youngest woman on the team taking notes. As roles are rotated, everyone gets the opportunity to practice facilitation skills and contribute more fully to meetings.

When people feel ownership of what's happening in meetings, they're more willing to participate.

By rotating who is in charge of meetings, you can more evenly distribute leadership opportunities. When people feel ownership of what's happening in meetings, they're more willing to participate.

### 4. Ensure every voice is heard

During your meeting, you can invite team members to share dissenting views by asking to hear perspectives that haven't been considered yet. You might directly ask anyone you haven't heard from to voice their opinion. This doesn't mean putting someone on the spot. Instead, take the time to understand different working styles and recognize cultural differences, as these play a strong part in how people interact in meetings.

Remember, not everyone prefers to contribute to meetings in the same way. While extroverts might speak up in person, introverts may be more inclined to share comments after the meeting or through the chat functionality of a virtual meeting.

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## 5. Be transparent about how decisions are made

One way to encourage openness is by being transparent with your team. When people understand how their feedback is used, they feel more invested in the decision-making process. Transparency helps team members connect more deeply with their work and encourages future contribution in meetings.

At the start of your meeting, clarify if and how any decisions will be made. For instance, you might share that after the whole team has been given a chance to offer their input on a new project, the stakeholder with decision-making authority will need to consult a finance manager before determining the final outcome.

Transparency helps team members connect more deeply with their work and encourages future contribution in meetings.

By taking these steps to ensure everyone feels included, valued, and comfortable participating in meetings, you'll foster an environment that honors diverse perspectives and ideas, and promotes a sense of belonging. While these practices aren't exhaustive by any means, they're a helpful start to making your meetings more satisfying and impactful for your business.

Find more practical tips on inclusivity in the workplace in the free Primer app.

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