# Using Meeting Norms to Increase Efficiency and Inclusivity

Norms are standards of behavior a team expects of its members. By explicitly stating norms, every member of the group will understand how to act (and interact) with others. They also provide a standard against which members can give each other feedback.

Norms are useful in a variety of collaborative settings, including meetings. Because not all situations require the same behaviors, it is useful to establish ground rules based on the type of discussion or meeting. Clear meeting norms will align the participants' expectations and guide the actions of team members so you can have a more productive discussion.

## General Meeting Norms

Some norms refer to processes, preparation and communication practices which can apply to any meeting.

### Process Norms:

- We will respect everyone's time by starting and ending on time.
- Only one conversation at one time. Refrain from side-talk.
- Capture off topic items in a 'parking lot' and agree to discuss them later at a designated time.
- Be present with the people you are meeting with. Put away phones and other devices during the meeting.
- Everyone is responsible for helping to stay on topic. Speak up if you feel like we're getting off track and need to move an issue to the "parking lot."
- Challenge past assumptions and sacred cows.
- Develop respect and an ability to listen and consider outlying opinions or ideas
- Address conflict head on.
- Look ahead to positive action, not back on shoulda, woulda, coulda.
- Aim for GETGO – good enough to go, not perfection.
- Everyone is responsible for upholding the norms. Acknowledge if you notice we are not doing so.

### Preparation Norms:

- Be prepared and come ready to engage. Read the agenda and do any prework ahead of time.
- Come empowered to make commitments for your area or function.
- Put aside other topics and work so you are ready to focus on the discussion at hand.
- Meeting material and agenda should be sent 24 hours before a meeting.

This document based on Mamie Kanfer Stewart's blog http://blog.meeteor.com/author/mamie/ and the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges community norms

### Communication Norms:

- Ask questions for clarification to help avoid making assumptions.
- Make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- Balance your participation – speak and listen.
- Listen actively to teammates without interrupting.
- Clarify when you are advocating vs offering an idea.
- Say it now, in the room. Avoid waiting till later to raise an issue.
- All voices count. All opinions are valid, but offer reasoning behind your thinking.
- Be honest – speak your truth as you see it. Use "I" phrases, and avoid assuming to speak on behalf of others
- It's OK to reflect and change your mind

## Norms for Specific Types of Meeting Conversation

There are many types of conversations that happen during a meeting. Every conversation will benefit from selecting norms that specifically relate to that type of discussion.

### Brainstorming Norms

- All ideas are good ideas.
- Build on the ideas of others. Use "Yes, and…"; avoid "No, but…"
- Defer judgment of ideas during brainstorming.

### Staff Meeting / Check-in Norms

- Be concise and to the point.
- Be open to feedback.
- Share only new information, not a repeat of old information.
- Be sure your information is accurate.
- Acknowledge when you don't have an answer but will provide it after the meeting.
- Share celebrations and challenges alike.

### Decision-making Norms

- We will use [consensus, consultative, majority rule, voting] as our decision-making process.
- Each person is responsible for ensuring they understand the options and arguments before making the decision.
- Be willing to support a team consensus even if you initially do not agree with it.
- Do not push your ideas on the team after a decision has been made.
- Acknowledge when you are playing "devil's advocate" to help test a decision or idea.
- Separate your own personal feelings from what's best for the team / organization.

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# Norms for Virtual Meetings

Virtual teams have additional layers of complexity because everyone is not in the same room. Consider using norms that address the common behavioral challenges with virtual meetings.

- Turn on your video unless impossible. Body language is important for effective communication.
- Do not multi-task (do other work) during the meeting.
- Use the mute button at your site to prevent the transmission of background noise.

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