



Creating inclusive meeting environments: A guide to meaningful participation





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Inclusive meetings ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to engage, contribute and be heard. Whether you're planning a small discussion or a large gathering, fostering an accessible and welcoming environment is essential for effective communication and collaboration.

This fact sheet provides practical strategies to support people with a range of communication needs, from preparation and facilitation to ongoing engagement. By making thoughtful adjustments – such as offering materials in different formats, using clear language and structuring meetings effectively – you can create a space where all voices are valued.

By prioritising inclusivity, we not only enhance the meeting experience but also empower people to participate with confidence, ensuring discussions are more productive and representative of diverse perspectives.





Understanding individual needs

Start by making sure everyone involved has the opportunity to share their communications preferences with all meeting participants. Some may benefit from bringing a support person, getting materials in alternative formats, such as simplified language, visual aids, or customised formats that work best for their specific needs. Taking time to understand each person's requirements demonstrates respect and creates a foundation for meaningful engagement.

Preparation is key

- Share meeting materials well in advance, allowing everyone sufficient time to review and process information.
- Make sure all forms and documents are accessible to everyone.
- Test any technology that will be used during the meeting beforehand and offer assistance with setup or troubleshooting if needed.





Facilitating effective communication

- Begin every meeting with a round of introductions, including names and roles, even for groups that meet regularly.
- Use natural, everyday language throughout discussions.
- Maintain a measured speaking pace with intentional pauses to ensure everyone can process information. Periodically check your speaking tempo.
- Replace specialised terminology, acronyms and technical language with clearer alternatives. If certain terms are necessary, provide a glossary with clear explanations.
- When complex concepts arise, follow them with straightforward explanations. Allow time for questions and ensure understanding before moving forward.
- Follow the agreed agenda as people will have prepared based on it.
- Address topics in order, inviting questions and comments before concluding each section.
- Clearly indicate transitions between agenda items, using visual cues or verbal signposts like "We've completed our discussion on funding options and will now move to program scheduling".
- For long meetings, include times for breaks at the start of the meeting. Ten-minute intervals provide excellent opportunities for participants to refresh and recharge.





Engagement support roles

A dedicated support person can enhance participation by:

- Helping with preparation before the meeting
- Helping people navigate meeting procedures and protocols
- Ensuring everyone has opportunities to contribute
- Offering accessible, impartial information and guidance
- Assisting with processing complex or sensitive topics
- Supporting time management and prioritisation
- Helping people develop meeting engagement skills
- Coordinating logistics with meeting organisers
- Collaborating with the chairperson to enhance inclusivity
- Managing meeting schedules and reminders
- Offering post-meeting debriefing and documentation support when needed.

