How to Guide: Inclusive Meetings
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ABOUT THIS HOW-TO GUIDE

WHAT IS IT?

This Guide is a reference tool for those who host and participate in meetings, whether virtually or in person. It provides suggested processes and resources to plan and host or chair inclusive meetings, and then follow up with participants after the meeting using methods that ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all.

HOW-TO GUIDE OBJECTIVES

The success of any meeting depends on the active participation of all attendees. By proactively considering how to create an inclusive space for your participants, you can ensure that everyone can contribute fully, feel like they belong, and that their perspectives matter.

Although some of the suggestions below may not be applicable to every meeting, we recommend reviewing the guide and incorporating as many practices below as possible.

We also recognize that the Guide is not exhaustive, and we welcome feedback at equity@uwaterloo.ca, so that we can ensure this document stays relevant to our campus community.
Preparing for the meeting
Preparing for the meeting

- Consider reviewing a calendar of major religious/cultural events before scheduling your meeting (e.g. Well-being Waterloo Region Calendar).

- Send out an agenda in advance of the meeting with time allotments. If appropriate, allow people sufficient time to add items to the agenda. Send out any materials for review as far in advance as possible, to allow people an opportunity to formulate responses or ideas.

- Ensure you ask meeting participants if they have any accessibility requirements. For example, Please let me know if there's anything I can do to make the meeting more accessible or comfortable.

- Familiarize yourself with the nearest gender-inclusive, barrier-free washrooms and emergency exits, so that you can provide that information to attendees if required.

- If the meeting is hosted by or in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, ensure the room allows for the burning of sacred medicines (i.e. sage, sweet grass, tobacco, or cedar). Contact indigenousinitiatives@uwaterloo.ca to ensure that the correct supports are in place to facilitate smudging.

- For documents that you plan to hand out, use a minimum 12-point font in a Sans Serif font such as Arial; avoid font colours that are not high contrast.
For PowerPoint presentations use a minimum 18-point font in a Sans Serif font such as Arial and high contrast between slide backgrounds and font colour.

Best practice is to have copies of PowerPoint presentations available in hard, or electronic version for meeting participants. When creating distributable copies consider:

- using a minimum 18 point font in a Sans Serif font such as Arial;
- if using Microsoft, use built-in slide templates;
- avoiding text boxes and complex tables;
- using unique and descriptive slide headings;
- using alternative, descriptive text on all images and graphics; and,
- high contrast between background and font colours.

Make use of Accessibility Checker functions in Word and PowerPoint.

If you have questions about making meeting tools or presentations accessible, review the resources listed at the bottom of this document or contact the Workplace Accessibility Specialist.

If you are providing food at your meeting, avoid foods with common allergens in them (e.g. peanuts), and make it clear to your meeting invitees through appropriate signage which diet the type of food is safe for (e.g. gluten free, halal).
Starting your meeting
Starting your meeting

Especially if it's the first time that the group is meeting together, best practice is to start a gathering with a territorial acknowledgement, which is a statement that names the Indigenous peoples that live(d) on the land we occupy, acknowledges the colonial history/present of the land we are on, and is an important first step towards reconciliation.

An example you can use is:

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

Customize your territorial acknowledgement so that it specifically relates to the topic and content of why you are meeting. Native Land is an excellent resource to locate yourself within the territory where you reside and work.

Territorial Acknowledgement in Virtual Times

Since many individuals are spending more time at home, both living and often working, it is important to not lose sight of the importance of territorial acknowledgements. The Xwi7xwa Library, a centre for academic and community Indigenous scholarship, have developed a land acknowledgement research portal that provides guidance and resources on virtual territorial acknowledgements. You can also visit the Indigenous Initiatives Office territorial acknowledgement website for additional resources and guidance.
Chairing/Facilitating a meeting
Chairing/Facilitating a meeting

Ensure that you start and end the meeting on time, but do not draw attention publicly to participants that enter a meeting late, as some attendees may have medical, personal or care related reasons for not arriving on time. Ending meetings late can also impact attendees who have other work commitments or are responsible for the care of others so should be avoided whenever possible. Convey to participants when the meeting time is ending – and offer a rescheduled time to continue the conversation, unless the situation is urgent, or all participants volunteer that they'd like to continue for a set period of time.

Ensure that you have provided copies of the agenda to all attendees.

Start meetings by asking people to introduce themselves by their name and pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them etc.). Ensure that you indicate that people can share their pronouns if they are comfortable doing so, recognizing that some people might not feel safe to share their pronouns. If you're able, best practice is to lead by example.

Recognizing and using people's pronouns correctly, and not making assumptions about what gender they identify with based on their name or outward appearance/dress, is vital to creating an inclusive space.

If you’re using any images in your meeting or presentation, signal important information or key words verbally.

Some attendees may experience fatigue or pain, so ensure that you signal to folks that they can walk, sit or stand as needed throughout the meeting. In a virtual meeting, offer for attendees to have cameras on or off depending on their circumstances.
When chairing or participating in a meeting, pay attention to the language being used, and whether or not it is inclusive of all people at the meeting.

- Best practice is always to use **person first language** (e.g. staff members with a disability, students who identify as LGBTQ2+).

- If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, **use they/them until you're made aware of their pronouns**, or just use the person's name in lieu of pronouns. Where possible correct other participant's misuse of pronouns. If you realize you have used the wrong pronouns, correct yourself and continue talking - it's best practice to avoid drawing more attention to the error.

- **Avoid using explicitly gendered terms** like *ladies and gentlemen* or *guys*. Instead consider options that are more neutral: *everyone, folks, all*, etc.

- **When referring to First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples, use as specific a term as possible** (e.g. Cree scholar). If an umbrella term is unavoidable, use the term Indigenous as opposed to Aboriginal. Do not use the term 'Indigenous Canadians', as Indigenous peoples identify as nations within nation, and not as part of Canada. Additionally, using the phrase 'our Indigenous peoples' connotes ownership/paternalism and therefore should also be avoided.

- Where possible and appropriate, **reframe less inclusive language someone has used in a more inclusive way** and redirect non-inclusive lines of conversation.

- Be cognizant of **ableist language**, especially terms that are often used to empathize but can be received as microaggressions, and lead to further marginalization. For example, *that's so crazy, that's lame, it sounds like your requests have been falling on deaf ears, they sound like they're blind to the problem.*
- Be mindful of privilege, and of power dynamics.

- Ensure that certain voices are not dominating the conversation, and that you are intentionally encouraging participation from all voices.

- Give due credit to people for their ideas, as contributions from people from marginalized groups are often lost or misattributed to someone else.

- Ensure that participants are not interrupting or belittling one another. If a heated disagreement arises between two participants, summarize the points made and then move the discussion back to the wider group.

- Take note of who wants to speak, keep a list of who has raised their hand to contribute comments, and take those comments/questions in that order. In virtual meetings, encourage participants to use the 'hand up' function if available.

- Be conscious of the ways in which equity-deserving groups\(^1\) may have different needs to feel fully included. Regardless of your identit(ies), be open to feedback from members of equity-seeking groups about how you can help facilitate their full participation.

Communicate the meeting's planned schedule, and any real-time amendments to the agenda. For example, *I’m adding 5 more minutes to the discussion on this topic, and then we will move on to the next agenda item.*

Clearly summarize the key points of the discussion, for recording of the minutes, and to allow participants to offer any clarifications.

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\(^1\) Including but not limited to women, racialized peoples, First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples, LGBTQIA2S+ people, people living with disabilities, those who exercise cultural and/or religious practices, and any intersections of these identities.
Following up from a meeting
Following up from a meeting

✅ If someone brings attention about lack of inclusiveness to you during or after a meeting, do not explain it away. Best practice is to own up to mistakes made and incorporate feedback into future meetings/gatherings.

✅ If you are a participant in a meeting, raise any concerns you have around inclusivity with the chair of the meeting.

✅ As the chair of the meeting, if you hear concerns about a participant in a meeting, consider raising those concerns with the individual involved, after the meeting.

✅ Ensure that you follow up with attendees who may have experienced macro, or micro aggressions after the meeting to validate their experiences, offer support or advocacy. Respect the level of conversation or involvement that attendee wants to have in discussing or taking any incidents further.

✅ Wherever possible at the end of a meeting, invite participants to share additional feedback or input via email/phone call, and outline the timeline for folks to do so. Build in time to the process to allow participants to respond/contribute meaningfully before the project advances.

Some attendees may process information differently, take more time to verbally articulate their feedback, or may have other reasons for not sharing important opinions or perspectives in the meeting time.

Providing alternative avenues for response will capture a broader spectrum of input from attendees with differing processing and articulation styles.
If you would like any more information about how to be inclusive on campus, or for questions about these guidelines, please connect with the Equity Office:

email: equity@uwaterloo.ca
uwaterloo.ca/hrei/equity-office

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [Guide to conducting accessible meetings (PDF)]
- [Guide to planning inclusive meetings]
- [Creating accessible PowerPoint presentations]
- [Creating accessible Word documents]