

## Delivering truly great meetings

**We know there are lots of benefits to working in a dynamic way including reduced travel and time costs.**

However, how do we ensure we run truly effective meetings with staff that are physically present and those that are remote? This guidance will help you to deliver inclusive meetings that add value and deliver desired outcomes.

### Planning your meeting

Before scheduling a meeting think:

- What is the purpose of the meeting and what do I want to achieve?
- Do I even need a meeting to achieve the desired outcome?
- Who should to be invited?
- How long will the meeting need?
- What resources do I need to send out beforehand?
- Where and when should the meeting take place?

### Meetings can take can have different purposes / outcomes:

- decision making
- collaborative/interactive creative activity
- Information sharing

Or all three!

Using an [outcome-based agenda](#) will help in you in your planning and inform participants of the desired outcomes of the meeting.

Our [Aston Covid pledge](#) sets out the positive behaviours we expect from colleagues when engaging in virtual meetings.

As the facilitator, focusing on being inclusive in virtual meetings can have a real impact on team cohesion, innovation, and engagement. Here are some tips on how to achieve this.

## **Before the meeting**

Send out the agenda, and any prereading or actions required at least 4 days prior the meeting so participants have time to prepare for the meeting.

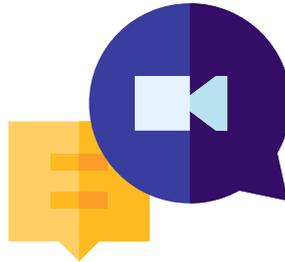
Encourage people to 'arrive' early so they are ready to go on time in case of technical difficulties.

## **At the start of the meeting**

- Provide a brief reminder of the agenda, welcome participants and ask people to introduce themselves if needed. A 2 minute "how's everyone doing?" is an effective way to put people at ease.
- Establish some ground rules such as: stay on mute unless contributing to the discussion. Raise your hand if you wish to speak. When holding a meeting with staff virtually and face to face at the same time, it is good practice to pause and ask if anyone else has any comments and look directly at the camera to check in on virtual colleagues.
- Keep an eye on the chat function and respond to comments or acknowledge contributions. In a large meeting, you may need to ask someone to manage the chat on your behalf.
- Watch the time and keep to the agenda. Don't cut people off. If someone is taking more time than expected, say something like, "We will need to move on so the next person can share."
- Rather than take notes, you can record the meeting and distribute it afterwards – before you do this, make sure all participants are aware that the session will be recorded. If you do need to take written notes – keep them action oriented and concise!
- One of the biggest challenges with virtual meetings is that participants can find it hard to get involved and contribute. Make sure that team members have plenty of opportunities to speak up. This is important when considering the introverts, reflectors in the group and those new to the team.
- During discussion, pause regularly and ask for participants' input. Use the Round Robin technique and ask everyone to comment on the subject matter. This encourages people to stay focused, and helps you monitor their emotions and attention levels. If someone is interrupted, step in quickly. You might say, "Wait a minute, I want to hear more of what Safa has to say," or "lets just pause. I am intrigued with what Luke was telling us. Luke, can you finish your thought?"
- Keep everyone engaged by using activities and questions that require their participation. If people are engaged, they are less likely to get distracted, and you will retain their attention for longer. Use the "raise their hands" function in Teams so members can response to questions. Use the chat function to share and enable communication to flow.
- At the end of the meeting, remind participants of the purpose of the meeting, identify progress made, next steps and review participation

## Other things to consider:

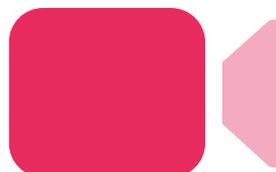
- Use the same background, to allow everyone to feel they are in the same place
- Larger meetings may make it difficult to hear from everyone - Consider the use of smaller sub groups, rather than dealing with issues as a large group – this enables shared roles and responsibilities especially if it's avoids predictable hierarchy.
- For longer meetings, try to organise your information into 10 to 15 minute segments. This accommodates shorter attention spans and helps keep everyone engaged and focused. Make it clear when you have reached the end of each section – perhaps by a change of pace in your delivery – so that participants are ready to go onto the next part.
- Using the same technology (Microsoft Teams) so everyone is familiar.
- A welcome with key expectations and behaviours



## Participants

**As a participant it can be a challenge to be visible in virtual meetings, here are some tips to contribute fully and raise your presence.**

- Keep your camera on when you raise your hand and want to contribute or periodically throughout. Additionally, keep your camera on at the start of a meeting and participate in the informal conversations before the meeting starts.
- Be concise and structured- decide what you want to say, state that clearly right at the beginning, give reasons for your views and end it – all in one go.
- Consider what you post on the chat – it is public after all!
- Even if it is not your turn to speak or you don't want to interrupt someone who is talking, you can still be active. Use the inbuilt engagement tools on online platforms to show your presence - use the hand raise, thumbs up and the applause options to respond at appropriate points.
- When using your hands use gestures but keep them where people can see them. Keep them either in the square of your body or slightly out and toward you. That way, if I put up three fingers and say, there's three things that we're going to discuss today. It's closer to your shoulder than it is to the screen s people can see that.

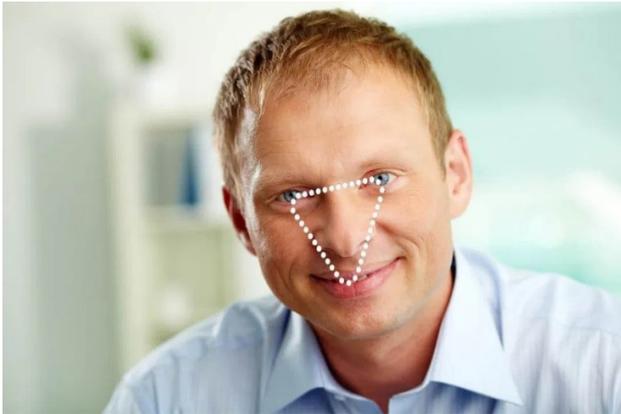


## Eye contact: The Triangle Technique

Eye contact is an important aspect of attending a virtual meeting. Think - where do you look when you are staring at your laptop screen – when you talk and when you listen?

Most of the time we look at our own image when we talk on screen. This makes our eye contact appear a little off to the people looking at us.

**Try this:** Start a dummy video call and trace your eyes as you look at different points on the screen. Mainly, notice the difference when you look into the camera lens and when you look at your own image on screen.



You will see that looking at the lens is the right eye contact to make with everyone, however, it is difficult to stare at the lens the whole time – that's not what we naturally do in physical meetings.

In physical meetings, the triangle is imaginary. You go through the eyes and mouth of the person in front of you every 5-10 seconds so you are not staring at someone the whole time.

In a virtual meeting, when it is your time to talk - move your eye contact in a triangle - the camera

lens, your image on the screen and another participant. Take turns to move your eyes to each to give an impression of a normal eye movement.

## Meetings on the go



When attending meetings from a public location – use your headphones to reduce noise, find a quiet place to avoid distractions and consider what you are saying in order to maintain confidentiality.

If connecting to a meeting whilst travelling on a train, you may lose connectivity – let the facilitator know in advance so they are aware.

## Further learning

Complete our elearning module on [Leading Productive Meetings](#).

## Resources

Tech Republic - [Virtual meeting 101: Body language tips for Zoom, Teams, and life](#)

Go to meeting - [Top 5 Body Language Tips for Video Conferencing](#)

Forbes - [8 Top Tips For Improving Your Body Language During Virtual Meetings](#)

Harvard Business Review - [To Build an Inclusive Culture, Start with Inclusive Meetings](#)