# Six tips for facilitating remote team meetings

Educator teams meet for many reasons, and now, many of those meetings have moved online. These tips are intended to help educator teams ensure meeting times contribute positively to team culture in spite of the physical (or social) distance between members, move productively toward shared goals, and ensure team members have a voice in shaping the meeting content.

Note that while these tips are intended for your regular, recurring team meetings — those wherein the team gathers to share updates and discuss pressing concerns — many of them may be helpful and relevant in other contexts, whether you're preparing for an informal morning huddle, a co-planning meeting, or an IEP meeting.

## 1: Team norms

**Generate team norms and build them into your meeting agenda for quick reference.**

It's helpful for teams to set both behavioral norms (e.g., honor confidentiality, mind how often and how long you speak) and procedural norms (e.g., start and end on time, keep cameras on). And it's helpful to set them as early in your work together as possible, before less optimal patterns of interaction develop and require interruption.

Any number of norms-generating protocols are remote-friendly with few to no adjustments, but we particularly like Forming Ground Rules (Wentworth, n.d.). This protocol is efficient, gives all team members an opportunity to share, and provides a recommendation for how to tame lengthy norms lists.

Simply creating norms isn't enough, however. We recommend printing norms directly on each meeting's agenda for easy reference and reserving a moment for team members to reflect on them at the start of each meeting, a practice that keeps norms alive and top of mind for team members. Additionally, if norms are to stay relevant, they should be revisited regularly — perhaps monthly — for possible revision.

## 2: Collaborative agenda

**Embrace a transparent, collaborative and predictable agenda structure.**

Invite all team members to elevate their ideas, questions and concerns to the team by adding them to a collaborative agenda. Collaborative authoring tools (e.g., Google Docs) make this especially easy. Here is an example (following this link will create a unique copy of an agenda template in your Google Drive).

Note that team members who add items to a collaborative agenda should introduce them with their names or initials so that the facilitator knows who to "pass the mic" to when the time comes.

Additionally, we recommend stacking agendas: When a given recurring meeting ends, the agenda for the next occurrence of that meeting should be created just above the old agenda, creating a running list of agendas and action items from meetings past.

## 3: Time for operations

**Reserve time to manage the operational burdens of meeting preparation within the meeting itself.**

Share the responsibilities of facilitating, timing the meeting and recording notes by assigning roles at the start of each meeting. This allows for all team members to have the opportunity to lead and distributes responsibility across the team. Alternatively, if a less “flat” structure is desirable, one educator (e.g., lead teacher) may wish to facilitate all meetings while other team members rotate roles as timer and recorder.

Once you have established your facilitator, engage in a bit of agenda curation at the head of the meeting as well. Are all of the relevant items on the agenda? Are they in the right order? These are questions that can — if built into the structure of the meeting — be answered expeditiously and collaboratively by team members.

Finally, at the close of the meeting, reserve time for two actions:

- All team members should ensure next steps are captured in the day’s notes.
- The recorder should copy and paste a blank agenda template for the team’s next meeting directly above the existing template, pull into the new template any items from the day’s agenda that weren’t addressed and pull into the new template any incomplete next steps.

These two final steps — provided you earmark time for them — help to ensure next steps and unaddressed agenda items aren’t “lost” and set the team up to expediently add new items to the next week’s agenda.

## 4: Time for reflection

**Help team members to show up as their best selves by building in time for recentering and time for reflecting on team norms.**

Consider starting each meeting with a moment of mindfulness. Our days are as busy as ever (perhaps busier), and with so many interactions taking place virtually, classes and meetings blur. It can be helpful to build a moment into the meeting structure to prepare mentally for the kind of thinking and discussion required by a team meeting.

Additionally, consider allowing the team a moment to revisit team norms before diving into the content of the agenda. The interpersonal contracts we make with each other are powerful! Taking the time to reflect on them at the start of each meeting sends a strong signal about their importance and sets the team up for engaging in healthy, positive and productive interactions. Team members might reflect on whether they would like to adjust or add to the norms, or they might identify a norm they’ll commit to focusing on more vigilantly during the day’s meeting.

## 5: Separate FYIs

**Separate “FYIs” from discussion items.**

As a general rule, it’s helpful to reserve meeting time for items that truly require discussion and to convey updates and “FYIs” via email. But sometimes an update might warrant extra attention. When that’s the case, consider flagging it on the meeting agenda in a separate category devoted entirely to read-only updates and providing the team with a minute to read them toward the start of the meeting. Then, without devoting time to discussing them, move on to your main agenda items.

## 6: Time for transitions

**Provide transition time.**

When it’s only a matter of changing virtual “rooms," it can be tempting to schedule meetings back-to-back with other meetings or instructional time. Instead, provide time on either end for team members to care for mind and body. For example, if you have an hour of time available, plan to meet for 50 minutes, allowing five minutes on either end.