

Meetings and Conversations – recommended best practices

- **Preparation** – set an agenda in advance if possible and know what the goals are for the meeting. Is there advance work that can make the meeting more efficient or smooth? Have you gathered as much pertinent information as you can, and are the crucial stakeholders or players going to be involved?
- **Time blocks** – carve out a set amount of time for discussion items so as to not run out of time, and to keep participants on track.
- **Time limits/turn taking** – consider time limits on comments to make room for more than one voice to be heard, and to avoid soapboxing, sidetracks/derailment, or speeches. Be sure that, within time constraints, more than one or two voices are able to be heard.
- **Collaborative problem solving** – foster a culture of agreement, an understanding that a team is there to work together on issues rather than go to war on opposing positions. Aim for win/win solutions rather than win/lose.
- **Reflective listening** – avoid listening only to respond or defend, which can lead to reactivity. Listen with curiosity to understand the other person. You can reflect back what you have heard to check for clarity.
- **Check your own behavior** – participants should agree not to raise their voices at each other, engage in attacks or insults, excessively speak over or interrupt others, etc. Think before you speak. Taking a deep breath can help. Avoid making sweeping generalizations and speaking for others.
- **Assume the best of the other party** – instead of jumping to the most negative interpretation of their idea or position, which can lead to misunderstanding or escalation in conflict. Use “I” statements more than “you” statements.
- **Recognize our common humanity** – remember that these are people having conversations or conflicts, and that people aren’t perfect. Treat each other well and demonstrate a willingness to listen and consider their words/needs even if you ultimately cannot agree.
- **Be ready to be the “bigger person”** and demonstrate emotional maturity in a difficult conversation, especially if you occupy the upper end of a power imbalance. Choose your words carefully and ask yourself if your comments are going to escalate or deescalate a disagreement.
- **Take more time if needed** – have a plan for next steps, taking a break, or additional meetings if the problem needs more time to be solved. Determine whether the work needs to be done through email, additional meeting(s), or both.

Agreements for difficult conversations or emotionally charged discussions:

- We will speak based on our own experiences
- We will speak only for ourselves, and not for each other or to represent a whole group (ex: no piggybacking, no dismissing your own perspective in favor of others)
- We will not speak to criticize, persuade, or lecture/give speeches
- We will refrain from name calling and raising our voices at each other
- We will listen with resilience, even when something is hard to hear
- We won't interrupt or go over time allowed, so that all voices can be heard
- We will listen with curiosity not judgement
- We will allow the facilitator to hold us to the agreements