



**Towards
Inclusive
Practice**

Including Everyone.

A guide to running inclusive meetings



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About this guide

This guide was developed as part of the Towards Inclusive Practice project. The project is providing advice to government and other organisations about how to be more inclusive of people with an intellectual disability.

Teams of Inclusion Advisors around Australia shared their experiences as people with intellectual disability about what makes them feel included.



For our first topic, people shared ideas about what makes a good inclusive meeting. Together we made this guide on how to run inclusive meetings.

This guide will help you plan and run inclusive meetings and know what to do after the meeting. It also has information about:

- why inclusive meetings are important
- the role of the Chairperson
- thinking about accessibility
- the role of support people in meetings
- running inclusive meetings online

It also has checklists to help guide you through the steps of an inclusive meeting.

The information in this guide is advice only. It is not an instruction manual. We recommend that the checklists be used in context of the meeting and its purpose.

Why do inclusive meetings matter?

People with an intellectual disability around Australia talked about their experiences in being part of meetings.

Meetings are an important part of working together. They are a way to find out more about issues or projects, hear the latest news, keep updated.

Meetings are also a place to connect with others to share information and ideas and work together in a way where people can contribute and make a difference.

There are lots of different kinds of meetings. They can be regular or one-off; formal or informal; small or very big; internal or with people from other organisations, including the government or other officials.

Whatever the type of meeting, people said it was important to feel included.

People said that when meetings are inclusive, it made them feel:

- Confident
- Less afraid to speak up
- Respected
- Like an equal

These are all important things for people to be able to contribute fully to a meeting.

People also shared stories of meetings where they did not feel included and how that felt.



“People talked to my support person and not me. I felt left out.” - Inclusion Advisor, TAS

What makes an inclusive meeting?

“Too much information to absorb can make my head explode. It can be overwhelming.”
- Inclusion Advisor, SA

Be clear what the meeting is about. Explain the purpose of the meeting and give the questions you want answers too. Let people know who else will be in the meeting.

Be clear on how to join the meeting. Give clear instructions on where the meeting is or how to logon. Some people may need extra time to attend morning meetings. Avoid starting meetings early.



Give all papers early and in Easy Read. People with an intellectual disability need time to read and understand any papers that will be talked about in a meeting. Give all papers 2 weeks before the meeting. Give the original papers and an Easy Read version.

Send a meeting reminder the day before. Meeting reminders help everyone do what they need to come to a meeting prepared and on time.

Give a contact if people are having trouble. Let people know who they can contact if they are running late or having trouble logging in to an online meeting.

Have clear meeting rules and roles. Introduce everyone who is in the meeting. Explain the meeting rules, such as one person talking at a time, and who is the chair, timekeeper, etc.

Keep meetings on topic and on time. Agendas with topics and timings help everyone know what is happening in a meeting. Let everyone know when you are moving to a new topic. Build in a 10-minute break if meetings go for 2 hours or more.

Give everyone time to participate. Some people with an intellectual disability need time to think about how they will answer a question. Give everyone time to think about their response.

Be clear on what is happening next. Explain what decisions were made in the meeting, what actions were decided on, and what will happen next.

Things that make a difference

People said that some of the things that makes them feel more included are:

- Knowing what the meeting is about
- Having clear meeting rules and roles
- Accessible meeting papers in Easy Read
- Information is not too long and does not have hard words or jargon.
- Having time to read information and prepare before the meeting
- Keeping discussions on topic and on time.



“Easy Read information given at least one week beforehand helps me feel prepared and less nervous.” - Inclusion Advisor, ACT



- When access needs are met – including asking about individual needs to be able to be part of the meeting.
- Being comfortable, including regular breaks, refreshments, and time to settle in and socialise.
- Everyone having a chance to have their say and be listened to – including only one person talking at a time, not talking too fast and making sure there is time for everyone to speak and not feel rushed.
- People do not talk too fast.
- People do not feel judged, and their opinions are respected.
- Knowing what needs to happen next after the meeting.

“The chairperson asked me what support I needed; they did not make assumptions.”
- Inclusion Advisor

We have used these ideas and people’s experiences to create the information in this guide and the accompanying tipsheets.

Planning the meeting

Meeting purpose and papers



Always be clear what the meeting is about.



If this is a new meeting, or if there are new members, share any terms of reference or meeting rules before the meeting.

Terms of Reference are the rules for the meeting.



Share information about who will be at the meeting, where possible.



Make sure the agenda and meeting papers are in an accessible format.

As a minimum, papers should be in Easy Read. Audio and other formats should be available as needed.



Have a clear agenda that includes the length of time for each item.

Include time for comfort breaks!



Be clear on any Actions from previous meetings that will be talked about.



Share any meeting papers at least 1 week before the meeting.

Include any questions you want people to answer before the meeting.



Ask people about any access, support needs or dietary requirements.

Make sure any support that people need is available on the day of the meeting.

Thinking about access

When we talk about access needs, many people think about wheelchair access.

Although wheelchair access is an important factor for any room or building used for meetings, there are lots of access issues to consider when running an inclusive and accessible meeting.

Ask first

For any meeting you are organising, always ask people if they have any access needs as part of the invitation. Ask everyone the same question. This makes access a normal part of the conversation. Also, people's circumstances can change so this gives people a choice about what they want to share. Even though people are asked, they are not required to share their information and may not wish to.

Universal Accessibility

Even if nobody requests any specific accessibility supports, it is a good idea to always use venues which have good accessibility anyway. Meeting venues with proper physical access are good for everyone, not just people with a disability.

If you are booking a venue for an accessible meeting, ask the venue about things like:

- Wheelchair access, and any steps or stairs
- Accessible parking or nearby public transport
- Accessible bathrooms
- Accessible entrance and exits, including emergency exits
- Facilities for a guide dog or assistance animals
- Audio-loops

The Disability Discrimination Act has rules about access to buildings, including requirements for Government buildings. Find out more at humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/frequently-asked-questions-access-premises

Accessible information



Using accessible information formats is essential for meetings with people with an intellectual disability.

Easy Read is the most widely used format by people with an intellectual disability. It uses short, clear sentences for each idea, avoids difficult words or jargon, and has a matching image for each sentence. See the Easy Read guides in these resources



Communication support

Some people with an intellectual disability may also need specific communications support related to other disabilities. This includes:

- Auslan or Deafblind interpreters
- Makaton (a form of basic sign language)
- Notetakers
- Closed captions
- Audio support
- Written information in particular formats for screen readers (.pdf, or Word)



Most interpreting services need to be booked in advance. Be sure to ask your meeting members in advance about their specific inclusion support needs.

“Talk slowly and give us time to process the information before answering.”
- Inclusion Advisor, SA

Other access considerations

Other things to think about when planning access supports might include.

- Other language interpreters
- Quiet spaces and breakout rooms
- Any specific dietary requirements
- Avoiding flashing or strobe lighting in presentations

Planning the meeting

Meeting times and locations



Be clear what time the meeting starts and finishes.

Start in-person meetings after 10am.

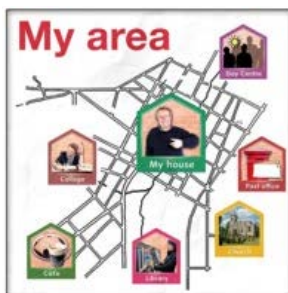
Many people use public transport or get support in the morning to prepare for the day.



Think carefully about the length the meeting needs to be. Do you have enough time to cover everything on the agenda AND for people to have their say?

A good way to do this is to allocate time to every item on the agenda and then add it up.

We recommend meetings last no more than 2 hours with breaks.



Be clear about where the meeting is.

Give the exact address and any useful information about how to get to there or parking.

A picture of the building and a map are helpful.



Ask people if they need support when planning the meeting.

Let people know they can bring a support person if needed.

	Be clear about what people need to do before the meeting to prepare properly. This includes any papers people need to read and thinking about any questions people might be asked.
	Tell people what to bring to the meeting to participate fully. This might be something to take notes with, some prepared answers, or some ideas.
	Give the details of who to contact if people have a question or if there is a problem.
	Send a reminder the day before the meeting in the person's preferred format, where possible.

“Do not have assumptions or pre-conceived ideas about people and what they can or cannot do.” Inclusion Advisor, WA

The role of the chairperson

The way meetings are chaired can make a big difference to how inclusive and accessible the meeting is for everyone.

The chairperson (also called ‘the chair’) leads and guides the meeting. The chairperson has some standard duties in any meeting. This includes housekeeping, covering all the topics in the agenda, and keeping the meeting on time.



The chairperson also has a role to ensure the meeting is inclusive. Some things chairpersons can do to make meetings more inclusive are:

- Making sure everyone has a chance to have their say
- Being clear about meeting rules
- Giving people enough time to think and respond
- Calling for breaks as needed
- Making sure there is no use of jargon or complicated terms

“A good meeting is when I am able to express myself, have time to respond and feel like I am being heard.” - Inclusion Advisor, SA

*“When I was in a meeting, I actually chaired some meetings and the other person took minutes, and when I had that experience, it felt incredible to be a good leader.”
-Inclusion Advisor, Victoria*

Co-chairing

Co-chairing is way to make meetings more accessible for people with an intellectual disability. This involves two people having the role of chairperson and sharing the duties. The co-chair can be a person with an intellectual disability and someone else.

This might be:

- Someone from the organisation hosting the meeting
- An independent person from another organisation or the community.



Some of the benefits of co-chairing include:

- It helps people with intellectual disability to develop skills
- It is about working together
- It means that people with intellectual disability have a bigger say
- It can remind everyone to use accessible language
- People with an intellectual disability can help officials to explain things to others
- Shared understanding
- It can be easier to involve everyone with two chairs

Before the meeting, it is important for co-chairs to prepare by deciding how to share the tasks and ensuring the agenda and any papers are understandable.

Starting the Meeting



Making people feel welcome is an important part of inclusive meetings.

Help people know they are in the right place and how to get to the right room by making clear signs and directions.

If possible, have someone to greet any visitors.



Have refreshments available at the start of the meeting.

Ask people if they need support to get drinks.



Print and bring along spare copies of papers for anyone that needs them.



Agree who is taking the minutes at the meeting.

It is a good idea to have someone different from the chair to take minutes.

The host or chair should clearly explain:



- **Housekeeping** – this means telling people things where the bathrooms and emergency exits are, where any drinks and meals are served, and any other information so people can find their way around safely



- **Meeting rules** – this includes explaining how the meeting will be run, how people can be involved and have a say, how to ask questions and rules about being respectful of each other.

There is more information about how everyone can have a say elsewhere in this Guide.

Always have a 10-minute comfort break for meetings that go over 1 hour.

Check in with participants to see if more breaks are required.

Be clear that people can leave the meeting if they need to for personal reasons.



Role of the Support Person

What is a support person?

A support person is someone that attends a meeting with a person with an intellectual disability to help them during the meeting.

The support person can be chosen by the person with an intellectual disability, or with permission, may be provided by the meeting host.



What does a support person do?

The support person assists where they need to. This will vary from person to person. The person with an intellectual disability will decide what the role of their support person is. This might include:

- Reading out written information.
- Clarifying questions that are being asked.
- Assisting the person to get their thoughts together to ask or respond to a question.
- Explaining any jargon or difficult concepts.
- Taking notes.
- Assisting with getting refreshments or requesting a break.
- Any other tasks that the person requires.

“Ask if people want to bring an advocate or support person with them - but don’t assume they do or don’t want to.” - Inclusion Advisor, TAS

What does a support person NOT do?

The support person does NOT:

- Speak on behalf of the person, unless the person requests this.
- Give their own opinions.
- Use their phone during a meeting.
- Not pay attention.
- Tell the person what to say.
- Lead the conversations.



What does the host of a meeting need to know?

If you are hosting a meeting with a support person present, it is important for you to know who the support person is and what their role is in the meeting. It is also important that you direct all communication to the person with intellectual disability, not the support person.

It is good practice for everyone to introduce themselves and their role at the start of a meeting. The person with intellectual disability can choose if they want to introduce their support person.

The person with intellectual disability may want to give you an overview of what they expect of the support person. This should be done before the meeting starts.

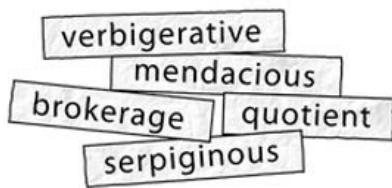
If you would like more information on the role of a support person in a meeting, speak to the person who is bringing the support person.

At the meeting - including everyone



Ask everyone to introduce themselves and their role.

Having an ice breaker or fun question can help people feel more comfortable.



Do not use jargon, acronyms, or complicated words.

If there are complicated words, explain what they mean and check that everyone understands.



Use different ways to communicate such as Easy Read, pictures, and PowerPoint.



If using PowerPoint, keep the information on the slides short.

Read out important information on the slides.



When using PowerPoint

- Use pictures
- Make sure the topic of discussion is clear
- Use as few words as possible
- Avoid jargon, acronyms or difficult words
- Include lots of white space



Make sure the meeting stays on topic.

Tell everyone when you are moving to the next topic.

It can be confusing for people with intellectual disability when the conversation jumps around.



Give people time to think and have their say.



After each topic, check if everyone understands and has had their say before moving on.

There are more tips about Including Everyone in the next section.

“Check in with us to see if we understand the information, for example “do you know what this means?” Give us examples when providing explanations.” - Inclusion Advisor, SA

Ideas for Including Everyone

Some people may feel uncomfortable speaking up or find it hard to join into a conversation. There are some strategies that work well, in-person or online.

Traffic Light Cards

Everyone is given three cards: a yellow card, a green card and a red card. This can be a laminated piece of paper in the three colours, or three objects in the appropriate colours.



The **yellow card** is raised when someone has a question that they would like to ask. The chairperson will need to watch for when yellow cards are raised and ask the person to ask their question.

A **red card** is used when someone would like the meeting to slow down, or they need clarification. This can be raised if people start talking in jargon, talk about multiple items at once, or the topic becomes complex or confusing.

The **green card** is used when a person agrees with a decision - for example in a vote - or has no questions to ask.

It is important that everyone has a set of cards and knows how to use them, so everyone is equal. The host or chairperson will monitor the cards that are raised.

Talking Stick

We have all been in meetings where several people are talking at once. This means that you cannot hear what is being said or get side-tracked into listening to another conversation.

The person who is holding the Talking Stick is the one who is talking. If another person wants to talk, the Talking Stick is passed to them.

A Talking Stick can be any item - it does not need to be a stick.

This works best for in-person meetings. It can be adapted for on-line meetings by using the 'raise hand' function as the Talking Stick.

The end of the meeting

Inclusive meetings are where everyone feels they have been involved in the meeting. Many times, we do not notice if someone does not feel heard in the meeting. We want to make sure that everyone participates, that all issues were talked about, and to gain feedback on how the meeting can be improved.



At the end of the meeting, the chair should remind everyone about what was talked about and any decisions that were made.



Ask everyone these three questions:

1. Did we talk about all the important issues?
2. Did everyone get to have their say?
3. Did people listen to each other?



Ask everyone for feedback on how they feel and how the meeting went.

Is there anything that would make the meeting better next time?



Be clear about what needs to happen next.

This includes any actions and who will do them.



Where possible, tell people the date of future meetings and any other details.

After the meeting

	Reflect on any issues of concern that might have happened at the meeting. Was everyone OK? Do people need some additional support or to talk?
	Write up the minutes and any notes in Easy Read. Consider if minutes are needed in other formats, for example in audio. Share the minutes within 1-2 weeks where possible.
	Contact members before the next meeting, reminding people about any actions and how to prepare for next time.

Resources from other organisations

Voice at The Table

Voice at The Table (VATT) is a Victorian initiative to increase the number of people with cognitive disabilities sitting on boards, committees and advisory groups. They have made a range of resources to make sure people can contribute as equals. This includes the *Consumer Participation Kit* and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* – a film about how poorly run meetings can exclude people:

- Consumer Participation Kit: voiceatthetable.com.au/resources/consumer-participation-kit/
- Good, The Bad and The Ugly: voiceatthetable.com.au/resources/the-vatt-film/

Council for Intellectual Disability (CID)

CID have a range of resources and tips about improving accessibility, including this handy Online Meetings Checklist: cid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Online-Meetings-Checklist-CID.pdf

Communication - It's not a spectator sport Guide developed by Speak Out Advocacy and parents with an intellectual disability. Explains acquiescence and has other useful co-designed information <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/resource/communication-its-not-a-spectator-sport/>

North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board

Self-advocates in the UK shared their Top Tips on how to make presentations interesting and accessible.

nypartnerships.org.uk/sites/default/files/Partnership%20files/Learning%20disabilities/NYLDPB%20Top%20Tips%20for%20Presenters.pdf

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