



October 2020

Nine tips for more productive video meetings



Overview

As 2020 unfolded, the way we work together changed in fundamental ways. For many of us, it's no longer possible to grab coffee with a coworker or gather with teammates in a conference room. Remote collaboration has become the new norm, requiring all of us to balance our personal lives with our work responsibilities. It's become more important than ever to be thoughtful about how you maximize your time and stay productive.

Meetings are an essential way Google teams work together, share diverse perspectives, and brainstorm new ideas. We've spent years thinking about how to make meetings more efficient and useful—and as our teams shifted to remote work, we applied what we've learned alongside new insights to make meetings more helpful to everyone.

This guide shares a number of lessons we've learned along the way. We reached out to Googlers who train others to run productive meetings—and have spent a lot of time thinking about their own transition to remote work—and asked them to share their best practices. Try one of their techniques next time you meet with your team.



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Reserve meetings for the most pressing matters

Before reflexively scheduling a meeting, consider the fact that everyone is juggling a lot of demands that go well beyond their jobs these days. Laura Mae Martin, Google's Executive Productivity Advisor, suggests asking yourself whether there's a better, faster way to gather input and take action. "If you can easily achieve the same objectives with an email, a shared document, or a casual chat, there's no need to have a meeting," she says. Along the same lines, there's no shame in canceling a meeting and giving people their time back when you realize beforehand that a scheduled video call isn't vital, says Kevin Bleicher, a technical program manager for Chrome OS.

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Laura Mae Martin, Executive Productivity Advisor, Google

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Only invite people who truly need to be there

According to research, once you have seven people in a decision-making group, each additional member reduces decision effectiveness by 10%¹. That's why Laura Mae Martin typically limits her meetings to attendees who can contribute meaningfully to the conversation, help the group reach a conclusion, or come away with new insights that will help them do their jobs. Besides, being extra thoughtful about who you invite to a meeting is a courtesy to those who are balancing other responsibilities.

¹ "Decide & Deliver, 5 Steps to Breakthrough Performance in Your Organization," 2010

If you're on the receiving end of a meeting invitation and don't believe your presence will add value, follow up with the host to share your thoughts and ask for a detailed agenda, Martin advises. If you still feel strongly that you don't need to be there, decline the invitation and offer a brief explanation.

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Send an agenda every time

You've heard it before, but Google Fiber training specialist Jose Gomez thinks it bears repeating: Always, always, create a short, concise agenda for your meeting and share it a few days in advance, along with any supporting documents (and specify if any should be reviewed ahead of time).

At the most basic level, an agenda helps ensure that key contributors actually show up. But it also compels the meeting leader to think carefully about the goals of the meeting before it starts, empowers participants to adequately prepare, and keeps the meeting on track once it kicks off—forestalling deep-in-the-weeds digressions. Gomez also recommends carefully considering the order of your agenda items, since the flow and tone of the meeting will depend on it.

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Strive for one takeaway for every 15 minutes

Ever come away from an hour-long video conference feeling dazed and wondering what—if anything—just took place? Make better use of everyone's time by following one of Laura Mae Martin's favorite rules: For every 15 minutes that your meeting lasts, aim for attendees to end the meeting with at least one takeaway. "If you're bringing a coworker up to speed on a 30-minute meeting they missed, you should have



two major pieces of news to share,” Martin explains. Ending the meeting with a brief recap of the most important items covered is also a good way to make sure everyone’s on the same page.

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Take running notes

Writing an ongoing account of the meeting as it unfolds can help keep people engaged while saving you time on follow-up, says technical program manager Kevin Bleicher. He likes to take notes in a shared document, project them for all attendees to see, and give everyone editing or commenting access. After the meeting ends, he cleans up his notes, highlights follow-up action items, and adds a summary for quick review. Encouraging everyone to actively contribute to meeting notes in a shared Google Doc or other collaborative tool is also a great way to make meetings feel more inclusive.

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Delegate meeting management

For big meetings, ask an attendee who’s not involved in strategic decision making to take notes, help the group stick to the agenda, and ensure that the discussion wraps up on time, Laura Mae Martin recommends.

For regular meetings, such as weekly team check-ins, Jose Gomez recommends giving everyone a turn to serve as facilitator. “It’s an opportunity to learn to juggle documents, presentations, meeting chats, and questions, alongside unexpected distractions such as being interrupted by a child or a pet. This develops your management skills differently than in meetings that are held in person.”



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Be thoughtful about engaging everyone

For people who can think on their feet and feel comfortable speaking in front of others, meetings offer a great opportunity to shine. But chances are your team also includes some quieter, more strategic thinkers who have dazzling ideas yet don't typically thrive in a group setting. As it's particularly challenging to "read the room" when you're not actually in a room together, training specialist Jose Gomez likes to encourage broader participation by calling on every attendee—even the less vocal ones—at least once if the meeting size permits. A great way to tee this up and avoid missing out on valuable input is asking guests for their thoughts and feedback when you send out your agenda in advance of a meeting. And to make the meeting even more engaging, encourage all participants to join via video with their cameras on. Being able to see faces allows for reading nonverbal cues and creates a richer experience.

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Captivate your crowd

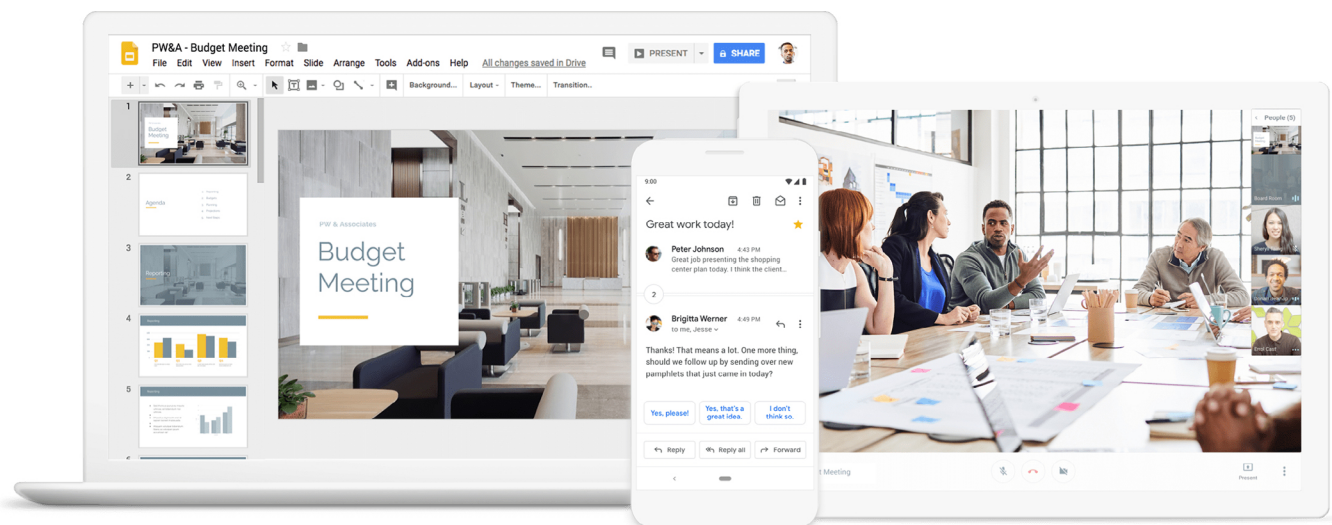
It's hard to power through a packed agenda when attendees are slow to join. To grab their attention and encourage punctual arrivals, Laura Mae Martin starts her meetings with a humorous YouTube video or other piece of engaging content. "People know that I kick off my meetings with something fun, so they're more likely to show up on time," she says. "And once the opener is done, everyone's paying attention and on the same wavelength." Jose Gomez recommends opening with a social icebreaker that unifies the group and creates a sense of cohesion, such as presenting a joke, a yoga stretch, or a fun question for everyone to answer.

Don't leave the fun at the beginning of the meeting either. Since chatting with teammates in the kitchen or by the watercooler is not an option for many teams right now, consider setting agenda items that are fun and informal that mimic personal lunches or run-ins. Laura Mae Martin suggests inviting people to share recipes, play virtual games, or show off pets as part of a meeting's agenda.

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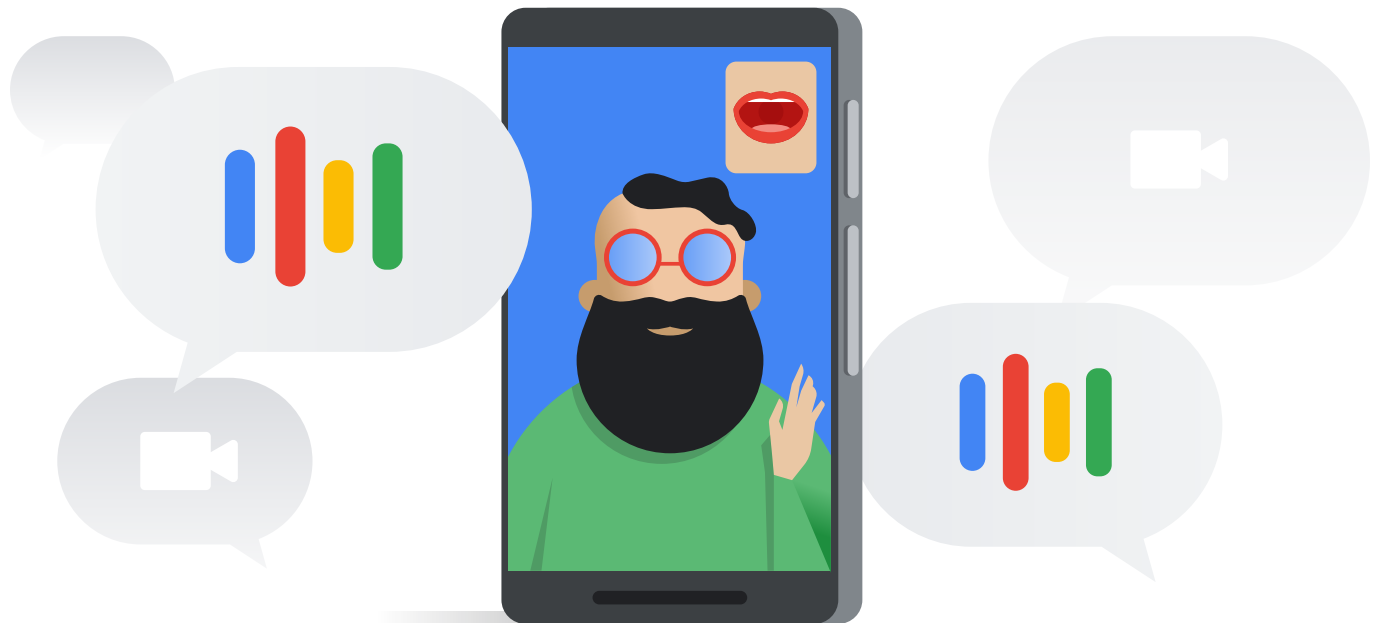
Follow up

Thorough and timely follow-up prevents all the important work your meeting sets in motion from fizzling out as soon as the last attendee departs. Jose Gomez recommends using a simple, manageable system such as a shared Google Sheet or Doc to list every decision the group made, and assign both a point person and deadline for each one. Usually within 24 hours and always within 48, he checks in with all of the point people via phone, email, or chat and updates each item's status. You can even use a no-code platform like [AppSheet](#) to create a custom app that helps you track and manage tasks, or follows up with a standard set of actions.



Wrap up

Along with these strategies, Google's meeting pros rely on Google Workspace to find convenient times, invite guests, share agendas, hold video conferences, and more. Try their favorite tools, including Google Meet, Calendar, Docs, and Chat, [for free](#).





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workspace.google.com