



# Group Norms and Ground Rules

## MEETING ENGAGEMENT TOOL

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### Description

Ground rules are used so the group can agree on how members will interact with each other during the meeting or process.

### Process

1. The group norms, also called ground rules, can be established in different ways, depending on the circumstances.
  - a. Large public meetings often state the ground rules without gaining input. This is appropriate if the same group will not meet again, group buy-in to the ground rules will not contribute to the meeting success, or there is limited time.
  - b. If a group will be working together for some time on a project or problem, the leader or a facilitator may develop some norms before the meeting, and ask the group for input at the meeting. The group will then have buy-in to the rules, which will become self-enforcing.
  - c. If there will be a long process, where the group must work together to solve a problem, the group members should develop all the rules together at the first meeting. The group will be more loyal to its own rules, and will often self-enforce them.
  - d. Consider establishing a ground rule that the participants are responsible for holding each other accountable to the established norms.
2. Ideally, the participants will help each other use the ground rules, but when necessary, the facilitator should remind participants of the norms they agreed to at the beginning of the meeting.
3. Post the norms where they can be easily seen and referred to.

### Benefits

- Buy-in by the group helps enforce good behavior.
- Buy-in sets a culture of cooperation.
- Ground rules are an easy first step where everyone agrees. The norms may be an early “win” for the group if group members perceive they cannot agree on the issue at hand.

## Considerations

- Norms that are not enforced cause mistrust.
- Norms should be stated often enough that everyone remembers them. Once a month or meeting.

## References

"8 Ground Rules for Great Meetings" by Robert Schwarz, June 15, 2016, *Harvard Business Review* at [hbr.org/2016/06/8-ground-rules-for-great-meetings](http://hbr.org/2016/06/8-ground-rules-for-great-meetings).