

Level the Playing Field Through Inclusive Meetings



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It's all about perspective. Diverse perspectives can contribute to a more complete and whole view of an organization and its challenges and strengths. Most of us understand the value of obtaining diverse perspectives, and including a variety of people and stakeholders in discussions and meetings, but are we doing it properly?

An [article](#) from the *Harvard Business Review*, authored by Renee Cullinan, suggests that several implicit biases often cause meeting leaders to overlook certain groups, namely, introverts, remote workers, and women.

Banish Meeting Bias

Cullihan identifies three biases that can affect the quality of your meetings, and offers some tips for overcoming them.

Bias #1: Smart people think fast.

Because extroverts are more likely to speak up about their opinions, they tend to dominate the conversation. While extroverts are thinking as they speak, introverts are still processing the information.

- **Overcome the bias:** In order to fight this bias, provide information about what will be discussed in the meeting prior to holding it, or during the meeting, ask specific people to chime in about their thoughts on a particular topic.

Bias #2: Those present in-person are most engaged.

Especially for organizations with multiple offices or with regularly remote workers, it can be difficult to hold a meeting that feels productive and even for all attending—whether in person or through the use of conference call or video technology.

- **Overcome the bias:** To ensure participation of all, make use of the most sophisticated technology available to your nonprofit. There are many video conferencing applications that are free. Also, pause the meeting regularly and ask if any remote participants have any questions or anything to add to the discussion. Remember to call on remote participants in the same way you would call on in-person participants.

Bias #3: Women have less to contribute.

Although it's unlikely anyone would admit to this bias, many studies have found that women are significantly more likely to be interrupted during meetings, and their ideas are often taken less seriously.

- **Overcome the bias:** Commit to ensuring equal participation by having a policy of no interruption. Foster a culture where anyone who notices this type of behavior must identify it when it occurs. If you're leading the meeting use a clear but direct way to remind an interrupting colleague to wait until his or her co-worker has finished.

Working to gain the perspective of as many diverse individuals as possible within your organization can help you move from a short-sighted outlook to a well-balanced and introspective full view of your organization's future. Commit to inclusion, and master your meetings!

Coping with Conflict

If unproductive meetings are the tip of the iceberg in your nonprofit, check out our recently published articles on conflict resolution. The following articles are featured in the Spring 2016 edition of our newsletter, [Risk Management Essentials](#). Prefer hard copies of the issue to share with your leadership team or direct reports? Send your request (quantity + mailing address) to: info@nonprofitrisk.org.

- [Clash of the Nonprofit Titans: Managing Board and CEO Conflicts](#)
- [We Can Work It Out: Managing Workplace Disputes](#)
- [The Dark Side of Leadership](#)