# Purpose

Working relationships can be challenging for teams working from home due to limited face-to-face communication and a lack of physical presence. This document provides guidelines and tips for employees working in virtual teams to work more effectively in building trust, improving collaboration, and leading meetings with colleagues remotely.

# Build trust with virtual peers

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| **Activities to build trust with your virtual peers** |
| **Establish and build relationships** | Set aside time to get to know your peers and share more about yourself so they can learn about you. |
| **Ensure your actions are transparent** | Gather your virtual peers’ input on decisions you make that impact them and disseminate information to them to keep them informed.  |
| **Be proactive in responding to our team**  | Reply to your virtual peers’ communications in a timely manner. Frequently delaying your responses can unintentionally make you appear inaccessible and unresponsive.  |
| **Maintain confidentiality of team operations** | Work with your colleagues to surface differing assumptions and to agree on norms for what information can be shared outside of the team.  |
| **Be proactive in assessing team progress** | Identify potential challenges or delays to projects and work with your peers or manager to resolve them. |
| **Review your own performance** | Informally solicit your virtual peers’ feedback on your performance early on. Evaluate what you may need to change to be more transparent, accessible, responsive, or proactive with your virtual peers. |
| **Share positive feedback** | Compliment your virtual peers directly or to the whole group when they meaningfully help you with a key task or problem. This helps motivate and engage peers. |

## Anticipate communication challenges

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| **Logistical issues** | **Language barriers** | **Stylistic barriers** |
| **Actions:** Establish mutually agreed meeting times and blackout periods to restrict meetings to specific hours. Create your own virtual peer communication calendar:* at what times are my virtual peers available by phone or instant message?
* how often do they check e-mail during the day?
* what are their travel schedules?
* when are they off for local holidays?
 | **Actions:** Acknowledge up front with your virtual peers that there will be comprehension difficulties. Consider these tips to reduce language barriers:* send out important meeting documents ahead of time
* create common terminology with clear definitions
* identify the most appropriate and efficient uses for different communication channels.
 | **Actions:** Understand your own communication style and how it differs from that of your peers. Consider these tips to reduce stylistic barriers:* learn to read and hear body language in electronic communications and virtual meetings
* reflect on how different perceptions of authority influence peers’ reactions
* consider ways you can use your communication style to promote stronger group interactions.
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## Understand your virtual peers’ work

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| **Work Processes***How do my virtual peers accomplish their work?* | **Incentives and Motivations***What motivates or enables my virtual peers to do their work?* | **Barriers and Constraints***What challenges threaten the success of my virtual peers’ work?*  |
| * What are the process steps involved in their work and how long does each one take?
* What inputs are required? Where do they come from?
* What teams/groups/stakeholders are involved in these processes?
* What interim deliverables or approvals are required before outputs can be completed?
* Who are the decision makers at each stage of their processes?
* Who needs to be kept up to date on progress/status, but is not a decision maker?
 | * What processes and deliverables are highest priority for my peers?
* What are the activities or deliverables for which others are reliant on my peers?
* Where do my peers feel the most pressure/urgency (e.g., steps of the process, time of year)?
* At what point(s) do my peers need help from me in executing their processes?
* Which stakeholders’ opinions/ perspectives do my peers value most?
 | * Who do my peers rely on for inputs into their work?
* What processes or deliverables are most difficult for my peers to complete?
* What activities require the most time for my peers to complete?
* Where are delays or limited resources creating challenges for my peers?
* Where do my peers’ responsibilities and objectives conflict with my own?
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## Conduct effective virtual team meetings

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| **Pre-Meeting** | * Circulate a clear agenda with time allocations
* Post draft documents in a central location and have all team members comment on them. At the meeting, only discuss areas of disagreement
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| **Start of Meeting** | * Reconnect the team with informal discussion
* Summarise decision of actions taken at the last meeting
* Clearly explain meeting goals
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| **During the Meeting** | * Call on and obtain everyone’s input; do not rely solely on colleagues who volunteer information
* Make the meeting engaging using interactive technology, including instant-messaging and real-time polling and collaboration workspace tools
* Have a team member take notes to send out after the meeting
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| **End of Meeting** | * List out action items, such as task assignments and due dates; post them in a central location for the full team
* Identify who will take notes at the next team meeting
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| **Between Meetings** | * Employ electronic communications to share both formal and informal news with the team
* Use automatic notifications of postings to a shared team Web site to keep members up to date on progress
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