

Building a Strong Group Community

A strong sense of community is a key ingredient to building a strong, thriving group. Communities may share a sense of place or location, of purpose, justice, or simply a shared understanding of what's right and wrong. Our [Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility](#) (IDEA) efforts are critical for us to walk the talk as a human rights organization. We work on creating an inclusive culture in which everyone feels a sense of belonging and is welcomed, valued and respected, so that together, we can build a bigger and more impactful movement for today and for the future. The principles of IDEA will become threads in the fabric of the group and will help grow community in the long term.

This sense of community helps to establish group identity and purpose, build a shared history, encourage collaboration, and attract new activists to join and stay in the group. Ultimately, taking the time to build community will unify your group and help all group members feel more connected and committed to the work and each other.

Top 6 Tips for Cultivating Community

Plan an Agenda:

A well-planned agenda can provide a dynamic flow to your meeting. It provides clear direction and purpose that everyone can follow and helps avoid stagnant moments. Prepare the agenda and share it with members in advance and review it at the start of the meeting. Lead with questions and encourage members to speak. Always include actions the group can take together. You can refer to the most recent Local Group Weekly Update for timely action suggestions. Think of varying or mixing up your agenda from time to time to avoid staleness. You can also include IDEA as a part of every issue you discuss. This [AIUSA Group Meeting Template](#) resource will provide a guide and template for you to follow, as well as a take-off point from which you can improvise and design your own agenda for future meetings.

Focus on Facilitation:

Whether in person or virtual, good facilitation methods will combine ease and awareness of the audience. Keep track of time and move through the agenda. Cultivate active participation and make space for discussion. Keep it fun! The [Virtual Meeting Facilitation Guide](#) provides clear guidelines and principles to follow to ensure that you run your virtual group meeting successfully.

Implement Icebreakers:

An icebreaker is a planned game or group activity used to open a meeting. They create an opportunity for everyone to speak at the start of the meeting, which increases the chances of them speaking up again during the meeting. They also provide insight into your group members' personalities or moods. Icebreakers can help members get to know each other better and add a layer of fun that helps everyone bond in a positive way. Icebreakers can help to build a sense of community and shared experience, which may be especially helpful and inclusive for new people joining a group meeting for the first time.

Name Community Agreements:

Sometimes known as ground rules or group norms, these are guidelines the group agrees on for how members of the group interact, communicate, and conduct themselves. They provide a structure for interactions and activities to happen in an orderly way. They help avoid chaos and conflict and help generate mutual respect. Setting Community Agreements gives group members an opportunity to express what's important to them as well as to learn what's important to other group members. Examples of Community Agreements for meetings are below.

Welcome New Members:

To successfully grow group membership, it is essential to make new members feel welcome and involve them in all meetings and activities. Designate a member as the welcomer and have them greet and orient new members as they arrive to the meeting. Take time for introductions when new members join the group and invite them to share their interests, issues that they are passionate about and their experiences with human rights. The [Welcoming New Members](#) resource has best practices that you can use when new members join a group meeting.

Center IDEA:

As an international, intercultural, intergenerational and intersectional movement of activists committed to protecting and advancing human rights for all, Amnesty is deeply committed to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA). Be especially conscious of micro-aggressions which can create rifts between members and ensure all members' contributions are acknowledged and respected. This resource on [Inclusive Organizing](#) has tips for ensuring your group work is grounded in IDEA.

Seven Norms of Collaboration

Work these norms into your facilitation style and encourage them for your group's conversation. Applying these norms consistently can improve the effectiveness of discussions by helping your group avoid misunderstandings and establish common ground that will enhance group collaboration and decision-making.

Pausing:	Pause before responding or asking a question; taking a moment allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue.
Paraphrasing:	Using a paraphrase starter (e.g. "So...", or "You're thinking...") and following with a clear paraphrase helps members of the group hear and understand one another as they converse and make decisions.
Posing questions:	Two intentions of posing questions are to explore and to specify thinking. Use focusing questions such as, "Which students, specifically?" or "What might be an example of that?" to increase the clarity and precision of group members' thinking.
Putting ideas on the table:	Label the intention of your comments. For example: "Here is one idea..." or "One thought I have is..." or "Here is a possible approach..." or "Another consideration might be..."
Providing data/examples:	Providing qualitative and quantitative data supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing, and interpreting data.
Paying attention to self:	Being conscious of self and of others, knowing what one is saying and how it is said, and awareness of how others are responding enhances meaningful dialogue.
Presuming positive intentions:	Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and discussion and prevents unintentional put-downs.

Sample Community Agreements & Icebreakers

Community Agreements

These are a few typical norms that help set expectations and lay the groundwork for building a strong community:

- Meetings will start on time
- A designated notetaker will take minutes and share them with everyone following meeting
- An agenda will be shared in advance
- Decision making is by consensus
- Team members will hold themselves - and each other- accountable for commitments made to one another
- Speaking from personal experience
- 'One mic – one speaker' agreement. No side conversations
- Assume best intentions when someone shares
- Treat each other with dignity and respect. Use direct names and appropriate personal pronouns.

These are some additional norms that can be helpful when meeting virtually:

- Post shared agreements onscreen before each meeting and ask if the group accepts these or wants to change/add anything to them.
- Mute microphones when not speaking
- Use the chat feature or raise hand feature to ask a question (instead of interrupting the person speaking)
- Check out the [Virtual Meeting Facilitation Guide](#) for more ideas!

Icebreakers

As explained above, ice breakers are thought-provoking questions meant to pique interest, welcome attendees, relax group members, and stimulate conversation during your meeting. They can effectively 'break the ice' for the meeting by engaging members immediately in a fun activity. It is a creative way to energize the group and get everyone focused. Group facilitators can also use icebreakers to creatively introduce topics or content of the meeting.

We suggest picking one icebreaker per meeting and putting a time limit on the activity so as not to take up too much of the meeting time!

Tips for Icebreakers:

- Establish that it's ok if someone is uncomfortable participating. Allow people to opt out.
- Stay positive. Steer clear of questions that have a negative, political, insulting or aggressive slant to them.
- Avoid questions that could offend some attendees. Keep IDEA in mind: Be aware of questions that might assume common or shared background, status, identity or experience that may evoke disparities in inclusion, diversity, equity or accessibility issues (eg. not everyone can take vacations; not everyone can play sports; not everyone has a job; not everyone is married or has

a family; not everyone celebrates the same holidays (religious differences); different sexual identities, etc.)

Sample Icebreakers:

- If you could visit any other time/place/period in history, what would it be and why is it interesting to you?
- What was the best gift you ever received? Give an explanation.
- What is your favorite food? Beverage? Describe your “perfect meal”.
- What is your favorite movie/tv series? Which movie can you watch multiple times? Why?
- Show any picture from your life and tell the story behind it.
- Name any three people from history you would invite to dinner?
- Where is your favorite place to be? Physical space, indoor/outdoor, home, city, state country, world.... Be as specific as possible. What does it mean to you?
- Who is your personal hero and why?
- What human rights issue first made you want to be active with Amnesty? Give some background.
- If this group had unlimited funds, what action would you like to see us do? Take on?
- Describe your best – or most fulfilling - moment as an Amnesty member.

Virtual Meeting Icebreakers:

- Ask everyone what dish they would want to prepare for the group. Ask them how they learned to make it, why it's significant to them, and any strong memory they might associate with it.
- Have everyone describe their current mood in one word or color. Have them explain their one-word mood descriptor to add more depth. Or you could just go with the flow and enjoy how cryptic some of the answers may be.
- *What do we have in common?* - As a group, build a list of at least 10 things that everyone present has in common (we are all wearing shoes, we all own a computer, we all joined group in (year); etc.
- Another variation: if everyone is joining virtually, identify and find 10 items that everyone has in their immediate area (we are all sitting on a chair; we all have headphones; everyone wears glasses; etc.) Observe everyone onscreen closely – what details can you find/notice that are shared and may not be obvious?