

# Setting board and committee ground rules

## Structured brainstorm

**Description:** A group discussion to generate a list of ground rules for future board or committee meetings. Ground rules are an effective way to build trust, establish norms for collaboration, and ensure all board or committee members work towards the same goal.

### Necessary materials:

1. Flipchart
2. Markers
3. Dot stickers

### What to put on your agenda:

1. Required attendees
2. Time estimate for the exercise

**Output of activity:** A list of 3-6 ground rules for board and/or committee meetings; ideally the ground rules are memorable and give the group easy language to use in-the-moment to keep future discussions and decision-making on track.

### Facilitation guidance:

1. In advance of the meeting, use your flipchart to **list examples** of the type of ground rules you're looking for. Potential ideas include:
  - a. "Ideas not people" – i.e. be objective about an idea and keep commentary focused on the idea itself, not the person or role who proposed it
  - b. "Because reasons" – i.e. focus on the current decision at hand and its implications for the future, not past reasons for a similar decision
  - c. "Get to curious" – i.e., ask questions if there is something you don't understand, instead of jumping to conclusions or immediately writing an idea off
2. At the start of the meeting, spend five minutes **sharing the value** of setting ground rules: they build trust, establish norms for collaboration, and are something that any member of the group can evoke if a future discussion starts to get off-track.
3. Introduce your **example ground rules** and what makes a good ground rule: it is short, memorable, and encompasses an ideal for how this group wants to work together.
4. Ask participants to **spend three minutes brainstorming** ground rules individually to generate a wide range of potential ground rules to consider.
5. Next, **solicit one ground rule** from each participant and **record the responses** on your flipchart. Spend up to one minute discussing each rule and answering questions.
6. Finally, give each participant two stickers and ask the group to **vote for their top two ground rules** using the stickers.
7. In follow-up, **type up the list of ground rules** and circulate with the group. Post the list in the room every time the group meets in the future.

**Tip:** To build buy-in, you might also share that this is an often-utilized tactic by major corporations in other industries.

**Tip:** Offer prompts such as "What makes you feel energized or valued on a team that you want to re-create?" "What makes you feel frustrated on a team that you want to avoid?" or "What do you think this team needs to do in order to work well together?"

**Tip:** If there's not a clear consensus around 3-7 ground rules, discuss any of the rules that are "tied," and then give participants one more sticker vote to further narrow the list.