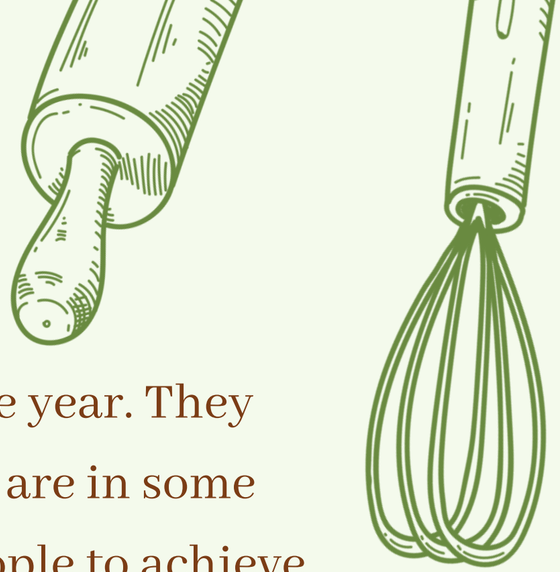
Barbecue time

Facilitating Online Meetings



What is an online meeting?

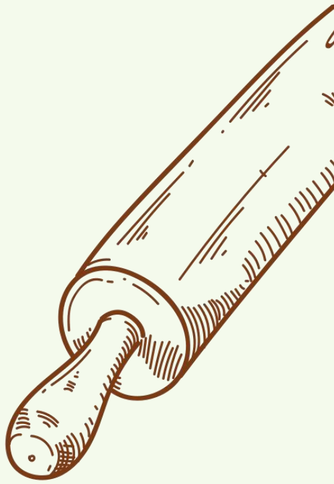
Barbecues bring people together and serve as a bonding experience at any time of the year. They can be small informal gatherings with some guests in the backyard. Online meetings are in some ways the same. They are a collaboration among a small- to medium-size group of people to achieve a desired outcome. They may serve a number of purposes, such as planning and brainstorming sessions, team meetings, weekly check-ins, debriefings, and short training, among others. Online meetings allow all participants to easily interact with each other.

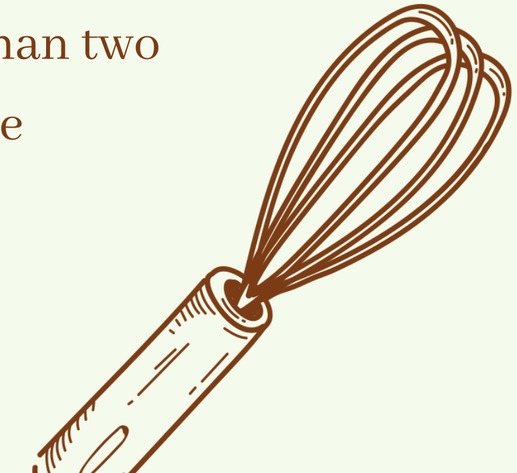
Who to invite?

You need to invite the team members relevant to achieving the goal of the meeting. When running a weekly check-in, usually a manager can invite her/his team or do one-on-one check-ins to get updates on current projects and uncover potential issues as they arise.

Preheating the grill

- **Share a clear agenda and relevant documents early** – A meeting with a vague purpose often leads to confusion and wasted time. Share a clear agenda with all the key issues to be discussed in the meeting. Also mention what role you expect from each participant.
- **Sending the invite** – Use a calendar integration to schedule your meeting. This ensures that the dial-in information and meeting link will be correctly provided to your attendees.
- **Clear objective and expected outputs** – Have a clear objective and share it with the group together with the desired outputs in advance and early enough so people can prepare.
- **Set time limits** – In the agenda, include the time to be spent on each item and use clock time, such as 9:30–9:45. Keep discussions on track and maintain focus on one issue at a time. Attention spans can be shorter when working online. For longer meetings (more than two hours), provide frequent breaks or introduce energisers. Be realistic about the time estimates.



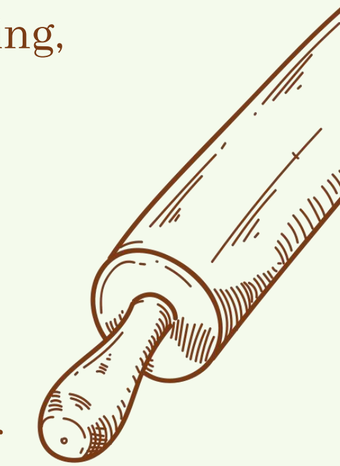


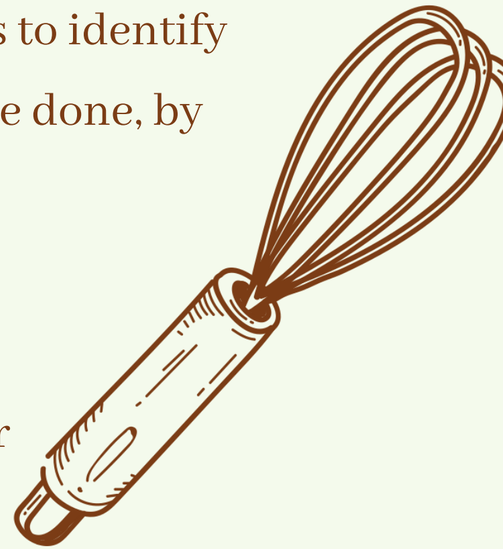
- **Keeping the team engaged –** Visualise the interaction. Decide on the best way to moderate and gather input from participants. Plan to include work collaboration and discussion by using various facilitation tools or breakout rooms. You can also reflect on questions participants can answer before the meeting to enhance time effectiveness. You can add a poll to determine the team's opinion.

Grilling and eating together

- **Give attendees a few minutes to join.** Attendees may be running from another session or may be having connection problems. Give them a few minutes to join and get settled.
- **Create a welcoming environment.** The best meetings are the ones where people feel comfortable to freely express themselves. If possible, turn the camera on while speaking or in order to greet people at the at the beginning of the meeting.
- **Facilitate the process with the objective in mind.** As a moderator, you need to listen actively so you can paraphrase, summarize, and include reflecting, follow-up and probing questions. Select an interactive facilitation method keeping in mind the objective of the meeting.

- **Encourage participation and be inclusive.** Provide different options and give enough space for participation. Ask people to raise their hand, write in the chat or respond to a poll for quick input or feedback. Use a whiteboard or other collaborative tools. Also consider power-dynamics in the meeting, and consider shy participants.
- **Breakout rooms.** For larger groups, breakout rooms could work well. Practice beforehand how to manage the groups. Consider more specialised collaborative tools that allow shared and visual brainstorming (e.g. Coggle, Miro and Mural).
- **Conclude with clear action items.** It is the responsibility of the facilitator to identify action items for each of the agenda points and get acknowledgment from all the participants. The key rule is to identify an action item, assign it to one individual and agree on a deadline: that is, what is going to be done, by whom, and by when. Without these three things, no action plan can be tracked effectively.





After-dinner conversations

- **Send relevant material as soon the meeting is over.** Send minutes of the meeting with a clear plan, items and any other agreed document.

Example: Team meetings