

Tips for Virtual Teamwork
MIT Ombuds Office
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Whether an ongoing business practice or a response to COVID-19, there are advantages and challenges to working virtual. Doing so effectively requires special consideration and attention. Please consider the following suggestions for virtual teamwork.

Identify primary technological tools to be used: Groups should establish methods they will use to share information as people work virtually. There are many different media to choose from, so having a clear understanding of which are central to business activities is crucial.

Ensure skills for using communication tools: For people using new systems for the first time, some amount of learning and practice will be essential. Taking time to build skills will pay off in the longer term. Colleagues may be able to provide guidance and online tutorials can be very helpful.

Centralize communications: Leaders should find consistent ways to share relevant information with their team members. This may include conveying institutional messages and/or team-specific information. In a dynamic environment, expectations or direction may change quickly, so keeping a regular flow of information is important. Even when things are unclear, it is better to let team members know what is known or still to be determined.

Clarify Roles: If changes are made to people's roles and responsibilities or job expectations, it is important for leaders to articulate them and ensure shared understanding for those impacted.

Focus on transparency: Sometimes it is easy to lose sight of what information some team members have versus others. Clear messaging is important and will reduce the phenomenon of people spreading rumors.

Maintain connection: Working remotely – especially for those who may not have much experience with the practice – may feel very isolating. Beyond formal communications to share business-related information, teams should consider making opportunities to have informal check-ins on a relatively frequent basis. Doing so at a set time can provide structure to schedules. Knowing that others may be experiencing similar challenges or learning how colleagues are operating effectively can be of great support. Of course, just hearing colleagues' voices and building comradery can sustain energy and a strong team environment.

Balance accountability and flexibility: This is an especially stressful time for people as they may be asked to work in different ways and concerns for family, friends and one's own health are paramount. Consider how you can be supportive to your colleagues – both professionally and personally – as everyone works through this difficult time.