

Leading welcoming and inclusive teams*

*especially in remote work environments

This guide captures the insights shared during the Equity Hub workshop at the *2025 Annual Summit in Montreal*. We've organized what we heard into practical actions you can weave into your daily leadership and teamwork practices.

Who is this guide for?

Anyone can use this guide, but it's especially crafted for team leads and those managing team members in the CapaCITY/É project. If you're guiding people, this is for you!

How to use this guide?

This guide follows the same three themes that shaped our workshop discussions: helpful tools and practices, building trust and rapport, and handling conflict. Feel free to jump to the section that resonates most with you.



1. Helpful tools and practices

The prompt questions for this theme generated discussion about how we communicate and share information. Several key insights emerged that are easy to integrate and can help eliminate confusion or misunderstandings, including co-creating agreements on communication speed, response times, and preferred communication platforms.

Email hygiene

- Add working hours to your email signature to set expectations around availability.
 - Schedule emails to be sent during working hours to respect colleagues' off-hours.
 - Use "To" for action, "CC" for FYI, and @mentions to address people directly.
 - Set clear expectations that instant replies are not necessary unless urgent.
 - Consider using shared team calendars to indicate working hours, time zones, and availability, especially for distributed teams.
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Meetings

- Consider 45-minute meetings over 1 hour to reduce fatigue and encourage focus.
 - Build in social time before meetings to foster connection.
 - Use recurring agendas to provide structure and continuity.
 - Send agendas in advance and prep attendees ahead of time.
 - Rotate facilitators and note-takers to share responsibility and develop skills across the team.
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Onboarding new staff

- Allow new team members time to settle in and understand the team and their role.
- Create a glossary of acronyms commonly used in your team or project.
- Compile a list of key organizations, contacts, and stakeholders the team works with.
- If possible, assign a peer buddy or mentor to new staff for their first few months to support their integration and answer informal questions.

2. Building trust and rapport

Trust and rapport are earned, not demanded. Below are some practices shared at the workshop to help build intentional connection and psychological safety, especially in remote environments.

- Take time to understand each person's unique needs and communication preferences.
 - Begin meetings with a quick non-work check-in, a simple way to show you care.
 - Rotate meeting roles to foster shared ownership and engagement.
 - Schedule regular virtual coffee chats or social time to keep connections alive.
 - Create safe spaces where people can express disagreement or uncertainty without fear.
 - Validate team members' expertise and contributions openly.
 - Be mindful of your own power.
 - Listen more, speak less.
 - Regularly ask for feedback on how the team and workplace can improve.
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3. Handling conflict

Conflict is inevitable in teamwork, but what matters is how you respond. What we heard from workshop participants was that it's important to address conflict early, stay fact-based, and demonstrate empathy and stay calm. If a conflict arises, consider the following:

- Address issues early, before they escalate.
- Keep the focus on facts and not personalities.
- Ask, "What can I do to help us move forward?"
- Stay calm and consider what else might be affecting the person.
- Own your mistakes and apologize when needed.
- Use scenario-based tools and change management techniques to navigate challenges.



Take a moment to **reflect.**

Leading a team is a continuous journey. Below are some questions to check in with yourself. If you want to explore these questions with someone or need support, reach out to the Equity Hub. We're always eager to help you create teams where everyone feels valued and empowered, including yourself!

- When was the last time I asked for honest feedback from my team and how did I respond to it?
- In what ways might my own habits or biases be shaping team dynamics, for better or worse?
- Have I noticed who tends to speak up and who holds back in meetings? What am I doing to shift that balance?
- How do I handle mistakes or conflicts within the team? Do I model vulnerability and accountability?
- How am I supporting team members' growth and well-being beyond their immediate tasks?
- When was the last time I made space for uncertainty, disagreement, or creative risk-taking?
- Have I created opportunities for team members to lead, make decisions, and shape our direction?
- What support or resources do I need to become a better leader?

Additional resources

University of Toronto EDI in Research Teams Handbook (2024)

Offers actionable strategies for inclusive research leadership: flexible meeting times, ensuring all voices are heard, providing virtual options, and applying an equity lens to all team activities. Includes guidance on handling concerns, supporting diverse team members, and designing welcoming events.

SSHRC EDI Best Practices (2022)

Outlines best practices for equitable leadership in research teams, including ensuring equal access to mentoring, distributing opportunities fairly, and creating inclusive team cultures.

NSERC EDI Guidance

Provides research leaders with frameworks for integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion into team management, recruitment, and retention. Includes checklists and practical tools.

Team Principles for Successful Interdisciplinary Research (Brown et al., 2023)

Review of best practices for leading interdisciplinary research teams. Emphasizes: strategic planning, clear role and task allocation, shared decision-making, open communication, valuing all voices, establishing authorship norms early, and fostering psychological safety. Highlights the importance of mentorship, trust, and team cohesion, and offers guidance on resolving conflicts and ensuring diverse perspectives are included and respected.