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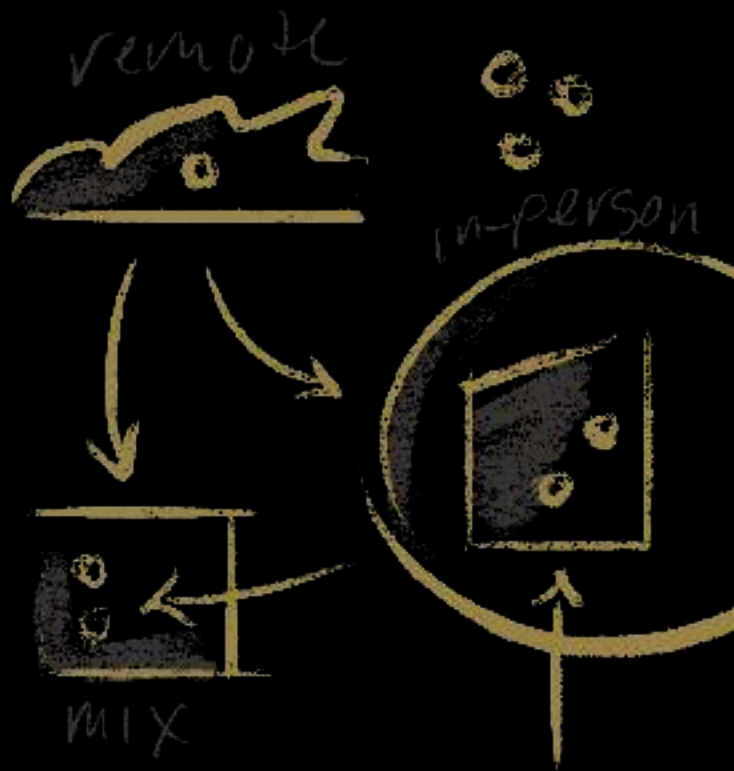
HYBRID

WORK GUIDE

DEFINE & NAVIGATE A HYBRID WORKPLACE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

+ RUN EFFECTIVE HYBRID MEETINGS AND EVENTS

This guide is for anyone curious about a hybrid workplace and implementing one into their organization. It will help you better understand and navigate the evolving and complex hybrid workplace so you can decide if it's the best fit for your team.



THIS GUIDE IS an exploration of how to:

- Define and disambiguate hybrid for your organization
- Foster hybrid work connection
- Create equal opportunities for in-person and remote workers
- Establish hybrid policies and systems
- Transition to hybrid
- Implement tools & processes for effective hybrid work collaboration

THIS GUIDE IS NOT prescriptive or a step-by-step “how-to”. Hybridity in the workplace is a complex topic and a simple solution will not suffice. It will require curiosity and willingness to observe emerging phenomena and continuously adapt; dynamism is the core of hybridity. This guide provides visibility on various aspects of hybrid work with suggestions along the way. It is important that you consider your unique environment as you begin to experiment and learn what’s best for your team and organization.

THIS GUIDE IS a working guide that we will update as the hybrid landscape evolves. This is a journey we’re on together. If you have experiences, problems, or observations, **we want to hear from you.**

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What is a Hybrid Workplace

A hybrid workplace is a [flexible workplace model that is designed to support a distributed workforce of both in-office and remote workers](#). The hybrid workplace isn't a completely new idea, with many companies (especially in the tech and start-up worlds) allowing flexible work-from-home policies or remote hires. However, there are now new ways of working across the board. Businesses have been forced to rethink the workplace in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global shift to a virtual business landscape during the pandemic presented [advantages and opportunities for remote work](#)—from an [increase in employee productivity](#) to an expansion in the capacity to connect and work with others. Many people are living fuller, healthier lives outside of work as a result of this shift. More folks now want to incorporate this way of working as we meet the new working threshold. To be exact, [42%](#) of the U.S. workforce today is working remotely full time.

The pandemic has also revealed the importance of in-person connection. There is no replacement for face-to-face interaction and the level of inclusiveness and collaboration it offers. As the world emerges from lockdowns, the business landscape now faces another shift as many companies are considering what it means to combine in-person and remote work in their organizations to create a hybrid work environment.

How to Use This Resource

Hybridity is an ongoing and dynamic situation, therefore establishing a hybrid workplace is complicated. There is no single way to approach it because there are copious factors that influence different variations of what it can look like (and even those can change). The purpose of this resource is to show you the possibilities, variations, and considerations of a hybrid workplace so that you can experiment with them and decide what works best for your organization.

The pandemic has changed the way we do business forever. We're living in a continuously evolving work landscape that challenges the location and distribution of our teams. It forces all businesses to stay on their toes—adapt or die. The question then is how do we adapt? Hybridity is the hottest topic this side of the pandemic—a flexible workplace model that combines in-person and virtual work by allowing workplace flexibility and prioritizing connection. A hybrid workplace supports employee's freedom to choose their optimal work environment—in-the-office, remote, or a combination of the two. Therefore, hybridity can take on different forms depending on the needs of your organization. It is intriguing territory that's shaping the future of work, and by popular demand: a recent [Ernst & Young survey](#) of 16,000+ employees found that 90% of respondents desire flexibility in the location and time that they



desire flexibility in the location and time that they work post-pandemic. Over half also said that they would consider quitting their current jobs if they were denied this flexibility. The people are speaking. Are we listening?

People are forming strong opinions on whether to go hybrid, remain remote, or go back to the way things were. Microsoft has implemented a new approach to support hybrid work in response to its employees' desires to have more flexible remote work options. CEO Satya Nadella says "hybrid work represents the biggest shift to how we work in our generation". Meanwhile, Morgan Stanley CEO James Gordan recently voiced his expectation for New York workers to return to the office by September or he'll be "very disappointed" saying, "If you can go to a restaurant in New York City, you can come into the office. And we want you in the office." While it's important to consider others' approaches to the future of work, you must find your own voice amidst the varying perspectives. Each situation is different. Lead with what's best for YOUR organization.

We take the stance that **THERE'S NO ONE WAY TO DO ANYTHING**. Success in evolution, of any kind, is about finding the best fit for you—your employees' needs, the company's needs, and customers' needs. So we're here to break down all aspects of the hybrid work landscape so that you can make the best decision for your organization.

Let's get to it.



Exploring Hybrid

Before you blindly jump on the bandwagon, do a full-environment scan of your current circumstances. Is hybrid truly the best option for your employees and your company, or are you doing it because it's the 'new norm'?

Hybridity in the workplace is much more than the location and time we work; it's not that simple. The merging of in-person and virtual work will mean the emergence of a completely new paradigm for all workers. Just like we had to [shift to different processes and systems for remote work](#), we must consider all the implications of what hybrid means, which might impact our business, and how we work together.

Disambiguating Hybrid

Everyone is talking about hybrid as a lump sum, but the term encompasses several aspects. When considering hybrid policies or establishing new working norms, it's important to first get clear on what exactly hybrid means. Most commonly, articles on hybrid are referring to the hybrid workplace—meaning who is working in the office versus at home, and how often. There are also hybrid meetings and events.



For the sake of clarity, consider the following distinctions of how we define hybrid:

HYBRID WORKPLACE where workers spend their time doing work (remote or in the office).

HYBRID MEETINGS how we design meetings that occur with a blended audience (some people in person, some participating remotely).

HYBRID EVENTS When meetings become large and specialized, the needs from a standard Hybrid Meeting shift.

Define What Hybrid is to Your Workplace

Hybrid by definition is simply the mixing of two different things. The way each company mixes in-person and virtual will be different. The unique needs of your company and the individuals that make up your team will impact how you arrive at your perfect mixture. Don't assume everyone wants the same thing when it comes to remote vs. in-person work presence. This is a benefit of the hybrid workplace – it allows flexibility depending on employee comfort level, schedules, and physical location. Get to know your employees' needs and preferences.

Prioritize People

Everyone has a different work style and this past year has provided people with the opportunity to get to know their own individual work styles. Some may favor continuing remote work because choosing their own environment is where they are most comfortable and productive. Others may need the structure and personal interaction of being in the office. Establish a structure that's best for the team + individuals.

* **NOTE:** Forcing people to either stay remote or come to an in-person office could backfire. Individuals that do not respond well to either environment may quit and find something that better suits their needs. Prioritize choice and make it crystal clear.

Here are some questions to consider to see if hybrid is a good fit:

- How/where do individuals work best—remotely, in person, or a combination of the two?
- Will employees return to in-person work part-time or full-time?
- How many offices will you have? Will there be multiple in-person offices and multiple remote?

If you think that a hybrid environment may indeed best suit your team's needs, there's another layer of logistical questions to consider:

- Are certain days of the week in-person?
- How is the team split between in-person & virtual? ½ the team one week and the other ½ the next week? (Spectrum does this). Are all employees required to be in person on certain days of the week?
- And in asking these questions, always come back to your purpose. Why are you making these decisions in light of the work environment and outcomes you're hoping for?

* **NOTE:** In order to design good hybrid experiences we have to consider how folks are distributed. The number of people in your organization is a critical factor. How are they spaced? Is it even? Is it lumpy? A seven-person working team is much different than a 500 person conference. There is a lot of variation. One person in one office and one person remote? 10 people across two offices and 10 people remote? Very different! Depending on where team members are (in-person or in-office) and how they're organized (by topic or focus) consider in-person smaller breakouts for people who are already together and virtual meetings/work sessions to connect the dispersed groups. (See more on meeting configurations in the Hybrid Meeting Policies section).



Depending on the individual and team needs, you could offer your employees different levels of work options. For example:

REMOTE FIRST primarily working from home

IN-OFFICE FIRST primarily working from the physical office

IN BETWEEN splitting time relatively evenly between working from home and from the office

Allow people to choose their best work environment, then it's about establishing equality amongst team members. **If folks mostly work from home, you have a hybrid strategy. If you mostly work in the office, then you just have a telecommuting policy.**

Employees must fully understand what to expect from each option before they can decide which is the best fit for them to ultimately create the best environment for them to do their best work.

Once you figure out the logistics of the hybrid setup, you must establish company-wide policies, systems, & processes and share them with your team.

Design for Inclusion & Equity

Work to maintain a company culture for everyone in the hybrid workplace, regardless of what they choose. Just because someone is not in the office does not mean they should be overlooked. Some people will work in the office more than others due to lifestyle (think: those who are single versus those who are caretakers for their family). Be wary not to punish remote workers for their work style choice.

[A McKinsey analysis of 800 jobs across 9 countries](#) found that 41% of employees reported being more productive when working remotely than in the office. However, this increase in productivity is not always

rewarded. Another [study of over 400 tech company employees](#) found that telecommuters experience slower salary growth than their in-person counterparts. [35% of workers did not receive a bonus](#) in a UK study of remote workers from 2011-2020. It also found that remote workers were less likely to be promoted.

To be sure that you maintain systematic inclusion and equity, consider these best practices:

- Institute policies** that fight against the tendency to favor in-person employees. For example, establish progression tracks that equally apply to in-person and out-of-office workers; they should not limit employees in respected workplaces.
- Consider having everyone come into the office on certain days so **no one is left behind**.
- Hold informal online meetups, virtual town halls, and **ensure virtual team members are included** in any perks that those in the office receive. For example, if food or coffee is provided to office employees, consider giving remote employees a snack stipend or coffee subscription.
- Prioritize social equity**. Design in plenty of in-person time to build trust and empathy for the times when you are remote.
- Establish agreements**, share them, honor them, use them when conflict arises, and revisit them if they are not serving your team.
- Create a playbook** and share it widely across the organization. Make sure everyone knows the rules of engagement. Be willing to change it.
- Listen to feedback**. Give folks the freedom to deviate when they encounter snags, and watch out for assumptions.
- Treat this as a time of great experimentation**. Stay open and receptive to the team's evolving needs.

* **IMPORTANT:** *Gender equity. Is one of our proposed hybrid work policies going to disproportionately impact women who need to care for children? In a yearlong survey of U.S. companies, [Stanford University economist Nicholas Bloom](#) found that "for people with children under the age of 12, you find almost 50% more women than men choose to work from home five days a week."*



Policies & Procedures

The key to a successful hybrid environment is a solid foundation. A dispersed team already faces challenges. To overcome them, establish clear policies, expectations, and norms, and clearly communicate them to your team to keep everyone on the same page. Hold space to regularly update policies in response to any gaps or holes you encounter. We are entering a time of great experimentation. The quicker that companies learn what works for them, the more successful they'll be.

Here's the kicker – you must define, articulate, and communicate your hybrid policies in each of the previously mentioned categories: a hybrid workplace, hybrid meetings, and hybrid events. While related to one another, they are separate entities and should be structured as such. There are many variants of each category. Employees need a predetermined structure to ensure all hybrid happenings run smoothly.

Hybrid Work Policies

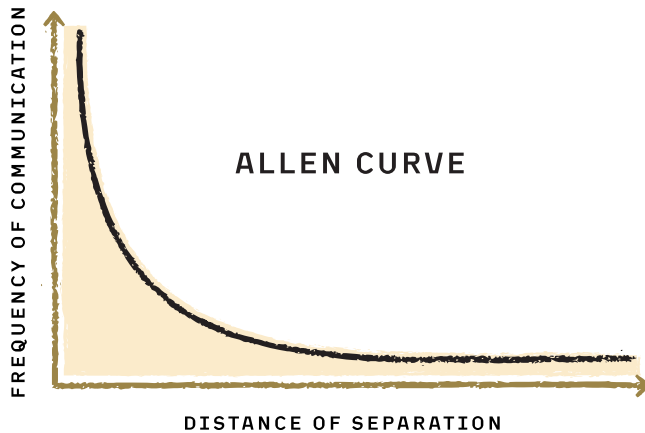
Get your work dynamics down to a science, but allow room for flexibility to adapt and change as needed. What are the policies around the presence in the office? What do schedules look like?

For example, Spotify is providing its employees with the opportunity to work from wherever they work best, including out of the office, with no pressure to be in person. Its [“Work From Anywhere” policy](#) is “a new way of collaborating that allows Spottifiers to work from wherever they do their best thinking and creating.” [Microsoft says its hybrid work standard](#) is working remotely up to half of the time, while [Google requires a “flexible workweek”](#) with three days in the office and two days working from home.

An on-going debate is whether in-person interaction is essential for creativity and collaboration. This concept has been studied longer than the current hybrid work emergence, popularized by MIT Professor Thomas Allen when he introduced the concept of the [Allen Curve](#) in the 1970s and 1980s. While researching technical communication between engineers, Allen explored the story of desk proximity—how in person accessibility positively correlates with innovations. He found proximity functions as a kind of connective drug; get close together and our tendency to connect lights up. One reason is the effect body language has on culture and attitude. Things like physical touch, eye contact, and energy levels make a positive impact on individual performance. Another reason is affirming



communication—cues of belonging during the workday that send the message, “You are safe here.” He found that successful group performance depends on behavior that communicates one thing: we are safe and connected.



Present day experts who study the issue say there is no evidence to support that teams must be in-person to boost innovation. Office workers may talk, but "there is almost no data whatsoever" to suggest it helps the organization, [Harvard Business School professor Ethan S. Bernstein recently told the New York Times](#). In fact, Bernstein and fellow professor Ben Waber conducted a [2019 study](#) that found workers at companies that switched from cubicles to open-floor-plan offices had 70% fewer face-to-face interactions. Contrary to popular belief, people did not find spontaneous in-person conversations and meetings helpful. They instead wore headphones to avoid one another.

The current work landscape looks different than when Allen studied proximity behavior, but his research holds merit. The takeaway: collaboration takes intentionality. You can't just throw people back into the office and expect things to magically be better. First you have to understand your goal, your purpose, and your people. Then you can begin to design structures that will draw collaboration from

everyone and encourage more participation. The Allen Curve is real, but if people go to the office just to throw on headphones, then they might as well be at home.

Decide what connection means for your organization

Then determine the best system for it. Establish individual and team schedules—an organized collection of what is best for each team member as well as the team as a whole. Then stick to it. If you find you need to make changes and adjustments along the way, make sure the entire team is part of the conversation. This could look and feel a bit like Tetris at first, but open communication and active listening with your team will help you make informed decisions that serve everyone's needs.

Hybrid Meeting Policies

Meetings are how we get things done. We must skillfully plan them so they run smoothly and create results, every time. Just as remote meetings require a specific structure and practices, hybrid meetings require their own set of rules and tools to make them effective. People will be participating from different places. What meeting structure will best support a blended team?

To have full and equal participation from everyone (in-person & remote) the interface for everyone's ideas must be consistent and have equal bandwidth. **No employee left behind!**


Have a plan for inclusion and participation. Consider the following:

- How will your team engage?
- What is the point of intersection?
- What is your inclusion model?



* **NOTE:** *Thinking about Livestream? If your group size is more than 20 people, participation requirements are low. Consider a live stream + an asynchronous polling/input mechanism (like [Control Room](#) or [Slido](#)).*

Here's an example of a hybrid meeting policy to establish amongst team members: whether they're in-person or remote, have all employees dial into the meeting on their own devices. That way, everyone is having the most similar experience possible. Remote employees won't feel as left out when everyone is joining the meeting the same way.

 **PRO TIP:** *Use the digital whiteboard tool [MURAL](#) to align dispersed team members on the same interface. Have individuals dial into video conference meetings on their own devices and also have a shared "point of engagement" in [MURAL](#) to collaborate in real-time.*

Creating effective hybrid meetings will require design consideration. The way people are contributing and how it's structured is going to impact how the meeting should run. For example, say there is a hybrid meeting with 10 offices in an organization, each office is a separate department. The goal of the meeting is for each department to ideate on a topic, then discuss the "winning" idea with the rest of the departments. If you're planning to start with department breakouts (where each department meets within their respective groups) and each department is already in person, meet in person then come together via Zoom to discuss findings with the other departments.

Design every meeting to meet specific needs and purposes

There are countless variations of team configurations. Here are a few examples of common scenarios you may encounter along with suggested approaches for improved collaboration:

As you can imagine, the permutations are endless. We'll never have an exhaustive list of every possible configuration. The important thing is that you consider your configuration:

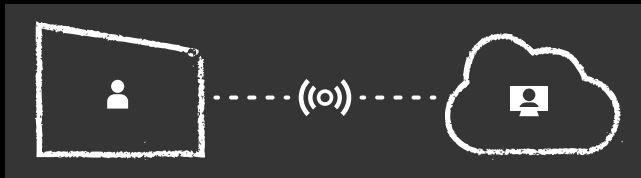
- How are people distributed?
- How is the environment shaped?
- What issues might arise and how might that benefit you?

When planning your next session, take a moment and map out how your attendees are distributed, how collaboration will flow, how the environment is shaped, and your point(s) of engagement. Then it's time to start thinking about the actual experience. Check out our [Workshop Design Template](#) to help guide you through that process.

No matter what configuration you encounter, meetings will benefit from acknowledging the [Magical Meeting](#) concepts and principles. We have effective meetings down to a science at Voltage Control, and we've created many resources to help you implement them with your own teams. From our downloadable [MURAL Templates](#) to our [Magical Meetings Quick Guide](#), use our [resources](#) with your team before, during, and after meetings to create your own magic.

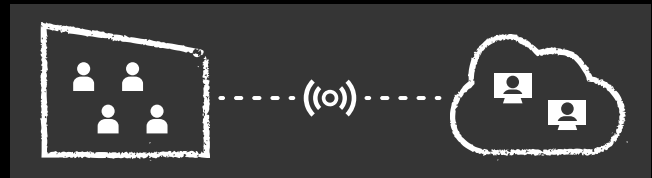
The meeting principles, tools, and practices are arguably more important to implement in a hybrid environment because there are more moving parts and endless variations of blended meetings; and we can't afford to be on a rocky foundation. For example, 1 remote person connecting to an onsite team is much different than 5 onsite teams connecting together. Identifying the hybrid structure that best fits your needs will allow you to thoughtfully design meetings ahead of time. The factors involved in your hybrid environment will impact the way you think about asynchronous work including necessary allotted work time, the need for breakout groups, etc.





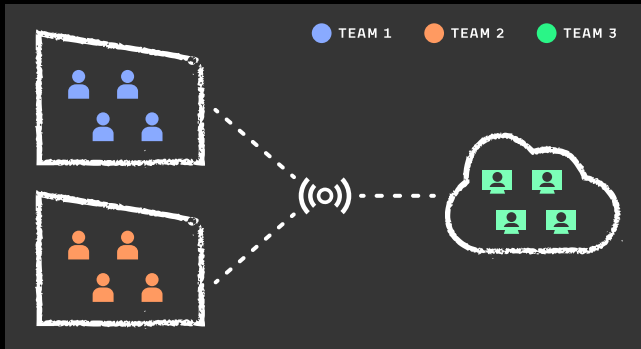
OFFICES: 1 IN-PERSON: 1 AT HOME: 1

Use video chat (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx) as you would in a standard remote meeting. The in-office people must consider who is around them to avoid including distracting noises in their environment. Will they need to wear headphones or a headset with a microphone? Or maybe they are in an isolated room. Audio takes priority, then, lightning, then high quality cameras (see our [Hardware Guide](#)).



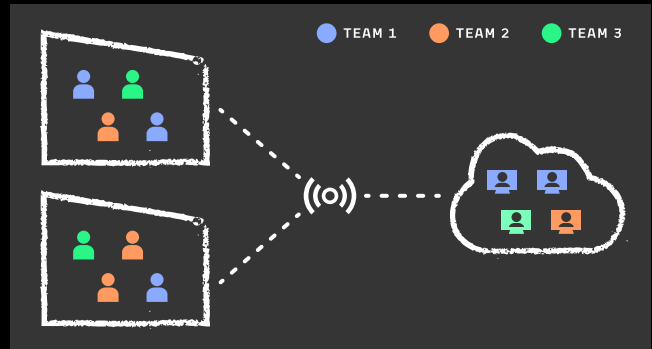
OFFICES: 1 IN-PERSON: 4 AT HOME: 2

Same considerations as the previous scenario with the addition that the 4 people in the office have the choice of being in the same room or in different rooms. If they decide to be in different rooms, it's very similar to remote wherein everyone dials into the meeting on their own devices. If they decide to be in the same room, they'll need to bring in 1 good omnidirectional mic to avoid audio "bounce-back" and feedback loops. The group will also need to provide separate video streams per individual or use software that can isolate each face (see the technology section).



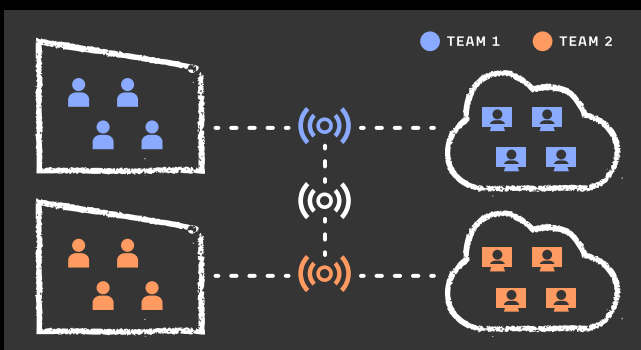
OFFICES: 2 IN-PERSON: 4 (EACH OFFICE) AT HOME: 4

Same considerations as the previous scenario. In this configuration, also consider that the 2 offices are different departments or teams. When the teams do breakouts, they can leave video chat and host those meetings or workshop activities locally. The same goes for remote people. They can just join a video call of their own to keep things simple.



OFFICES: 2 IN-PERSON: 4 (EACH OFFICE) AT HOME: 4

Similar to the previous scenario but instead of offline, in personal breakouts, you'll need to manage your team-based breakouts using your video chat software. This could still potentially be asynchronous to avoid virtual meeting fatigue!



OFFICES: 2 TEAMS: 2 WORKERS: MIXED

Similar considerations as 2 offices, 4 people in each. 4 people at home. But in this case, there are 2 blended teams (with in person and remote) that also sometimes need to collaborate. Therefore, there are 3 points of engagement: 1 when they are collaborating across teams, and 2 for each individual team. This is simplified for the sake of explanation, but as you can imagine, each team might create dozens of templates and collaboration points for any given project. The important thing is that you must consider how to bring people together and that they have a place to connect, share, be heard and contribute, meaningfully.



Hybrid Event Policies

Planning hybrid events will require much more prep work to get everyone organized and set up all necessary tools.

Decide on the most appropriate virtual [event platform](#) that supports all event needs:

- Live streaming support
- Integrations that offer the highest production quality
- Networking capabilities that allow easy attendee engagement
- Management capacity to run the event smoothly behind the scenes

Consider the scene you'll run the event from:

- Will you be on a stage with cameras to capture the experience?
- Will you be in an office and operate more like a typical video conferencing call?
- Decide the best scenario that supports the event—from the background to the props that will appear in the frame—then gather the materials you need to bring it to life.

It is also vitally important to properly set up all attendees beforehand so they are prepared. This may include:

- In-person walkthroughs to set the scene and ready cameras
- Lighting and other production gear
- Virtual walkthroughs on the virtual event platform to teach remote attendees how to navigate the space

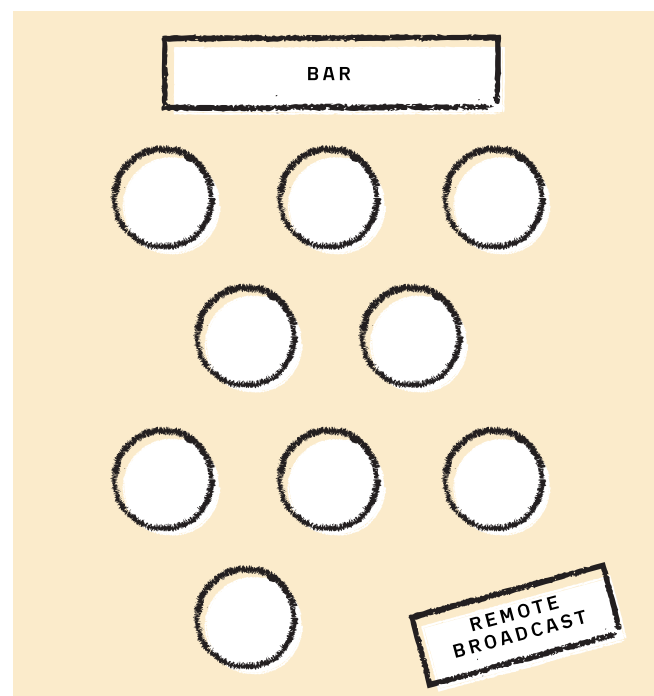
Will the event require attendees to have certain materials? If so, send event packages to distributed attendees beforehand. Make sure everyone is on the

same page and has what they need to participate before the event begins.

Keep in mind that hybrid events will have many different models: 1-to-1, 1-to-many, and many-to-many. Therefore, they will require variances in the structure around how they are clustered and organized.

- Are there cohorts that are together and how does that impact design?
- How many facilitators are needed and how will they work together? (More on this in Hybrid Facilitation).
- Similar to hybrid meetings, how will you bring people together when some are together and some are dispersed?

Just as we recommend mapping out your hybrid meetings, map out your event so you can consider the attendee experience. As you experiment with different event structure variations, be mindful of the trap to cater events to the in-person experience and unwittingly neglect the remote experience.



IN-PERSON: 100 AT HOME: 500



We have to custom-design events for the type of collective interactions and equanimity we want to create. To do this, we must keep social norms top of mind. For example, we can't throw all in-person attendees in a bar and expect them to go across the room to the camera in the corner and engage with remote people. It just doesn't work. If we design against social norms, we fight against them. Instead, use them to your advantage.

Consider offering different tiers for your event with different expectations. What is your version of "exit through the giftshop"—a practice used by museums to force all guests through the gift shop? Here are some examples:

- Implement a fun game that requires in person attendees to find answers or engage with other attendees upon arrival in order to make it past registration. Some of these people might be online, some may be in person. Individuals must interact with one another and the tools—think finding the person's video on Zoom + their designated spot in the event MURAL board (or some other point of engagement)—to find the answers to unlock access.
- Pair each event attendee with someone, or multiple people, that they have to locate and connect with throughout the event. Pair folks who might have things in common, or might be well suited to work together or learn from one another. Design in moments of interaction where they might discuss prompts or share experiences and reflections.

