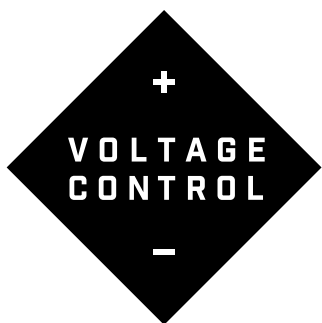
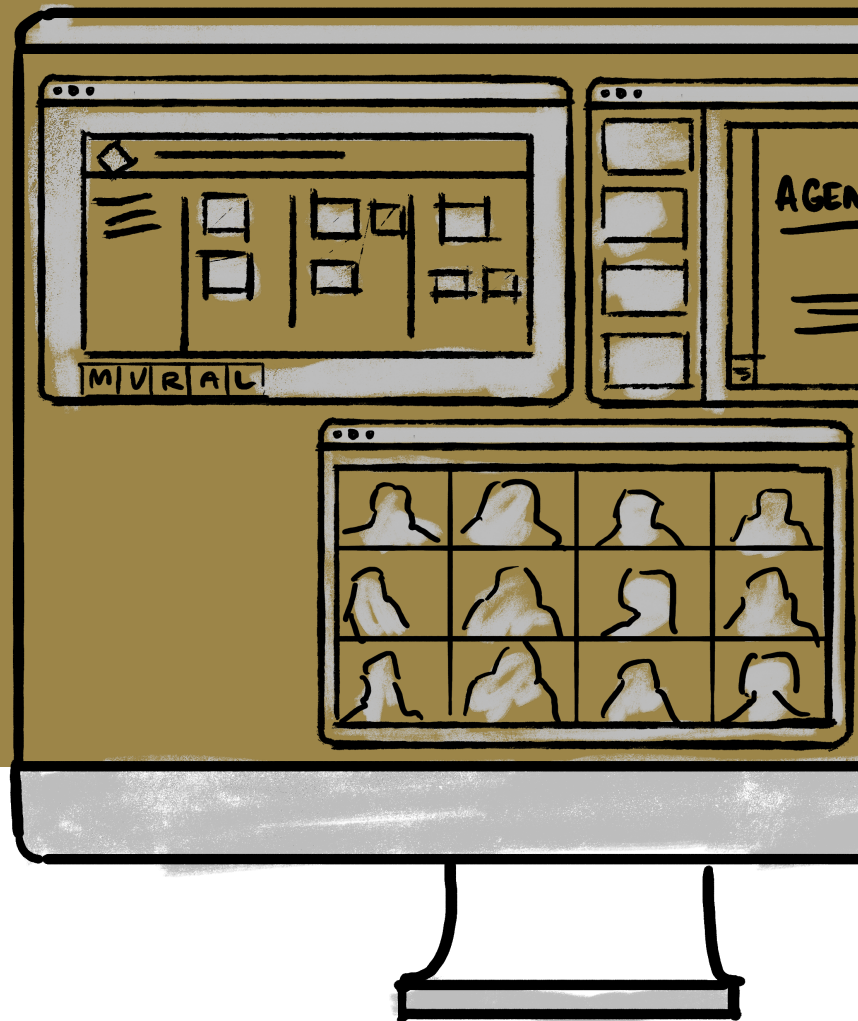


Voltage Control's

Virtual Work Guide

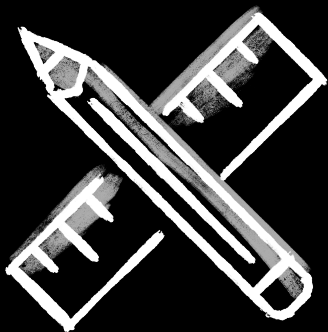


Introduction

The Voltage Control team has always been remote—our team members are distributed. We connect and collaborate virtually (aside from the times when we come together for our in-person workshops, Design Sprints, and events). Working in this way has given us firsthand experience with all of the frustrations and obstacles that can come with remote and virtual work. More importantly, we've also surfaced the best ways around these issues. It's more than just becoming proficient in the tools. We believe in exploring the why, the when, and the how. We've spent countless hours exploring the craft of virtual collaboration and we're still learning. We're sharing some of our favorite insights we've curated thus far for you to easily access and use with your own remote teams.

By the end of this guide, you'll understand how to best conduct virtual work meetings, virtual facilitation, remote Design Sprints, and how to keep and promote human connection in a virtual landscape. We also highlight the tools that make virtual work possible and most effective.

Let's dive in.



Productive Virtual Meetings

(Yes, it's possible!)

One of the most noticeable differences of working virtually is that screen time replaces face-to-face interactions. Everything from daily team stand ups to brainstorm sessions, and new product pitches to sprints are all done in a virtual meeting platform instead of together in a conference room or office. Remote interactions don't mean we can't have purposeful and successful meetings—normal meeting guidelines still apply. We just need to adapt to the virtual environment. Below are some proven tips and tricks for navigating virtual meetings, inspired by our Meeting Mantras.

Schedule with purpose.

This applies to in-person meetings as well—always have a worthwhile reason to bring people together. Without a clear purpose, the meeting will be vague and unfocused. This is arguably even more important when people are working from home and your meeting is competing against kids, food deliveries, spouses, background noise, etc. Identify the main goal of the meeting: Does a decision need to be made? Do new concepts or processes need to be developed? **Pro Tip: Address matters that aren't worth scheduling a collective discussion for via email, Slack, or a newsletter.** You don't want to waste anyone's time, not to mention the money that is lost to unproductive meetings—\$37 billion annually!

Create and distribute an agenda beforehand.

Only include essential topics. An important aspect of an agenda, especially for virtual meetings, is a realistic time table. What will be discussed, and for how long? Be sure to leave some extra time at the beginning of the meeting to let people set up the appropriate

tools they need to participate and for any “technical difficulties” that may arise. Also allot time at the end of the meeting for people to ask questions about anything they are unsure about. This will make certain everyone leaves the meeting on the same page. Once your agenda is prepared, send it to all attendees in advance to ensure everyone is prepped and ready. Another beneficial aspect to consider is the need for any pre-work. Remember, you want to be ready to hit the ground running and only focus on your objective during the meeting, not spend time preparing attendees during the scheduled time. Send anything that needs to be assigned to attendees prior to the meeting in order for them to be best prepared along with the agenda so that everyone is ready and harmonious. This not only saves time, but also increases engagement and productivity.

Break the ice.

An icebreaker is essential to warm up the crowd and help people get to know each other, especially when you find yourself in a virtual meeting with a new client, partner, colleague,



etc. (something more difficult to do via virtual meetings). Consider the mood you want to encourage and pick your icebreaker accordingly. It should be quick, relatively simple, and straightforward. Here are some icebreakers examples:

- + Where is one place you'd love to travel to?
- + If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
- + What does your ideal day look like?

Use the right tools.

A comprehensive list of useful tools for remote work needs can be found at the end of this guide, but some of the key ones we recommend specific to virtual meetings include:

[ZOOM](#)



[MURAL](#)



[LOOM](#)



[FIGMA](#)



[GOOGLE DOCS](#)



[LOGITECH](#)



[OWL LABS](#)

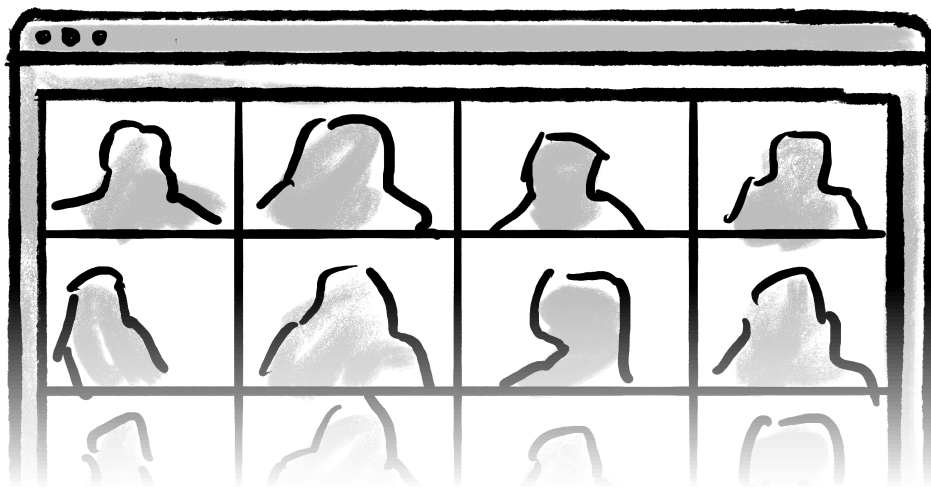


Zoom and Google Hangouts support remote gatherings. MURAL is a virtual whiteboard tool

that allows teams to collaborate on digital Post-It notes remotely. Loom is a tool that you can use to make quick screen captures with a video inset—it's much more visual than email and is extremely helpful when you can't go to someone's desk and show them something. Figma allows a team of designers to collaborate on vector design assets in real-time similar to how you collaborate on text in Google Docs. Logitech has all the products you need to set up your home office and support efficient remote work. Owl Labs offers immersive video conferencing to connect virtual team members and simulate in-person interactions with a 360° smart camera, microphone and speaker.

Be aware of video conferencing etiquette and best practices.

Respect everyone's time. This means taking into account all time zones when scheduling a meeting, and starting and ending on time. Stick to the agenda and encourage the use of video. This is especially important when you don't have the luxury of meeting in-person, and will also promote engagement and participation. If someone is typically more quiet or reserved, or they are getting talked over, actively engage them.



A Step Further: Facilitating Productive Virtual Meetings

Remote facilitation skills are more urgent than ever with virtual meetings. Team standups or weekly check-ins are relatively straightforward and likely require less facilitation, while other meetings such as hosting a virtual Design Sprint, brainstorming session, or innovation workshop require additional thought and planning. Here are some rules to keep in mind when you are leading a higher-stakes virtual meeting.

Build a realistic (and shorter) agenda.

When planning a remote meeting agenda, scale down expectations on how much time participants will invest. A good limit is no more than 2-4 hours in each day. Shorter virtual meetings mean that your session might have to stretch over multiple days (or weeks) in order to match what you might accomplish in a one-day, in-person meeting.

Create homework and group work.

One way to compensate for a shorter meeting is to proactively shift some of your exercises or activities to homework or group work. For example, if you want to review a report as a group, have participants read the report as pre-work before the meeting. Another way to extend your virtual meeting is to assign group work. **Pro Tip: Instead of making people stay on one call with a large group for hours at a time, split into small groups to complete a certain task or exercise. Try Zoom's "breakout room" feature to organize people in separate spaces.** These groups can then work via [Slack](#), email, or the smaller video calls to complete their assignment(s). Another benefit of group work is that you can cover more ground; for example, you can

brainstorm on three opportunity areas or topics instead of just one.

Break things down.

Long stretches of time listening to presentations may lead participants to check out. In remote meetings, it's even more critical to break your activities into smaller pieces. If your agenda includes three activities that take place in hour-long blocks, we recommend you get more granular. For example, break each hour down into smaller moments (i.e. 5-20 minute blocks of time) that include time for presentation, conversation, and questions. These compressed bits of time will keep your participants more engaged and create a focused yet breathable tone.

Set clear expectations ahead of time.

Make sure that participants come into the session with a crystal-clear idea of what to expect. This means more than emailing out the agenda an hour before the meeting. Send a few messages to your participants in the lead-up to the session, including the following:



Pre-meeting Message to Participants

Introduction: This is mandatory if you're new to the group. Include a picture of yourself, a short bio, and maybe a fun fact to build virtual rapport.

Outline the session: Give people an overview of the day. You don't need to go into the schedule by the hour, but outline the major activities, break times, etc.

Set expectations: Let people know how you want them to behave (i.e. one speaker at a time) and outline any ground rules.

Get people excited: Explain why this meeting is important and what participants will contribute and/or get out of it.

Assign any homework: Give participants enough time to complete their pre-work and don't forget to send at least one reminder about the expected deadline!

Introduce the tools: Make sure everyone knows what tools (i.e. Zoom, MURAL, etc.) will be used on the call so they can download programs ahead of time. Pro-tip: send a simple how-to guide of the tools' major features and functions to inform and instruct participants how to set up and navigate them.

That being said...limit the number of tools.

This is an important tip particularly if you are new to remote meeting facilitation: keep it simple. Don't overcomplicate your meeting—limit the number of different tools you use during your call. Yes, there are so many great ways to engage people virtually today (see the last section of this guide),

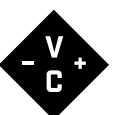
but don't try them all at once. Each new program or tool comes with potential technical difficulties and learning curves.

Pro Tip: *Incorporate just one supplemental tool in your call in addition to the video conferencing software. If you absolutely must use multiple tools in your meeting, be sure to build in extra time at the beginning for set-up and technical issues.*

Last but not least, sprinkle in some elements of fun and surprise.

The new norm is being on video calls all day, so expect that your participants will be fatigued. Think of ways to add the unexpected to your virtual meeting to make it more fun for participants. Go beyond just planning an opening icebreaker; inject thought-provoking or amusing elements throughout your session to keep participants involved and engaged. Some potential ideas for “spicing up” your agenda:

- + Start the meeting with a funny and/or inspirational video that's related to your topic.
- + Sprinkle your presentation with funny GIFs or memes to support the headline or main idea.
- + Create moments for participants to stretch or do a quick yoga or breathing exercise as a group.
- + Prepare a special playlist and play it as people “arrive” to the virtual meeting. Share the playlist afterward in a thank you/wrap up email.
- + Implement a Kahoot quiz as a fun way to reinforce knowledge and fuel some friendly competition!



Navigating Remote Design Sprints

Typically, a Design Sprint is a week-long process for tackling a business problem. It's more complex and in-depth than your average team meeting—over the five days, the sprint takes a team through a design thinking-based process to uncover insights, prototype an idea, and test it with users. When not in person, remote Design Sprints must be significantly adjusted to fit into the virtual work environment. However, that doesn't change our ability to collaborate, solve problems, and design impactfully—therefore, we can still have these meaningful meetings and workshops virtually. Here are some ways that we have adapted our Design Sprint model for remote work.

Move Slower.

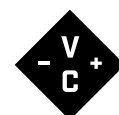
The pace of the sprint needs to be slower in a virtual setting. Things take longer online. While technology can speed us up, it can also slow us down. Virtual workshops account for many factors that we don't face when we're connecting face-to-face. For example, there is a limited ability to read the virtual room intelligence to ensure that everyone is on the same page. There are inevitably delays and extra processing time needed to get everyone on board no matter what tools you are using. Account for extra buffer time to set up and field mishaps during the sprint.

Another factor to consider in a virtual Design Sprint is that participants are more likely to get distracted online. An effective Design Sprint ground rule to increase productivity is to ban the use of personal devices. However, it's impossible to eliminate the distraction of screens during virtual Design Sprints because laptops and tablets are the means for connection. Facilitators will have the most success when they allocate extra time and are prepared to assist participants through distractions.

Tweak the Schedule.

Five full days in person is not equal to five full days virtually. Because things move slower virtually, people can't be expected to be glued to their desks for long periods of time. That's why we shifted our remote Design Sprints to a series of mini-workshops as opposed to five full days. Between each mini-workshop, homework is assigned and the expectation is set that participants will present their work at the next group session. Designing around the in-between times is powerful and an opportunity that in-person doesn't support. Similar to any other meeting, be considerate of time zones when planning each workshop.

Pro Tip: Use World Time Buddy to easily schedule across multiple time zones. The extra headache of aligning time zones is well-worth the benefits of connecting a globally diverse team, which is something we don't often get with in-person Design Sprints. It turns out that virtual workshops offer some incredible things that we can't do or get in person!



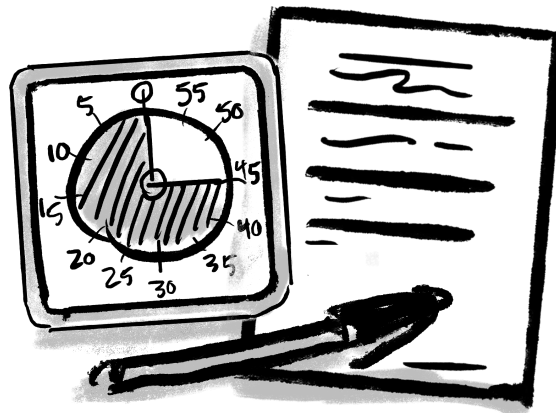
Set the Stage.

Virtual Design Sprints need more planning.

Virtual sprints require more preparation because there are more outside factors to consider. What are the best tools to use? What adjustments need to be made for timing? What are some methods to utilize to optimize engagement? First and foremost, participants need to understand the tools, the process, what is expected of them, how things will unfold, and why they are doing all of this in the first place. This is much different than doing a Design Sprint in person. In person, it doesn't take a participant very long to properly acquaint themselves with the sticky notes and a whiteboard. That's why it's extremely important to spend enough time getting everyone

acquainted with the new digital tools and processes so they are set up for success.

Another helpful preparation that aids in the process of training up participants is to set expectations before the workshop. Send the checklist and supplies list ahead of time so they know what to order and are ready to go. It's also incredibly helpful to make sure all participants know what their deadlines and deliverables are from the get-go so everyone can successfully accomplish them. As a facilitator, you demo the expectations and process for everyone else, field questions, and then let them go off and do their individual work. The goal is to have everyone on the same, productive page.



Finally, pick the right tech.

Use apps to support remote design thinking workshops. These are the tools we recommend to support your goals and needs for the Design Sprint. Our full comprehensive list of recommended tools can be found at the end of this guide.

Pro Tip: to pair well with the Figma prototyping, we built out a [MURAL template](#) to help the prototyping stitcher more effectively coordinate with the team on prototyping day.

MURAL | virtual whiteboard tool, allowing teams to collaborate on digital post-it notes remotely.

ZOOM | virtual meeting platform.

PEN & PAPER | some activities are best done locally first before sharing on the mural board.

FIGMA | allows prototyping teams to collaborate in real-time on a digital prototype.

The Need for Human Connection

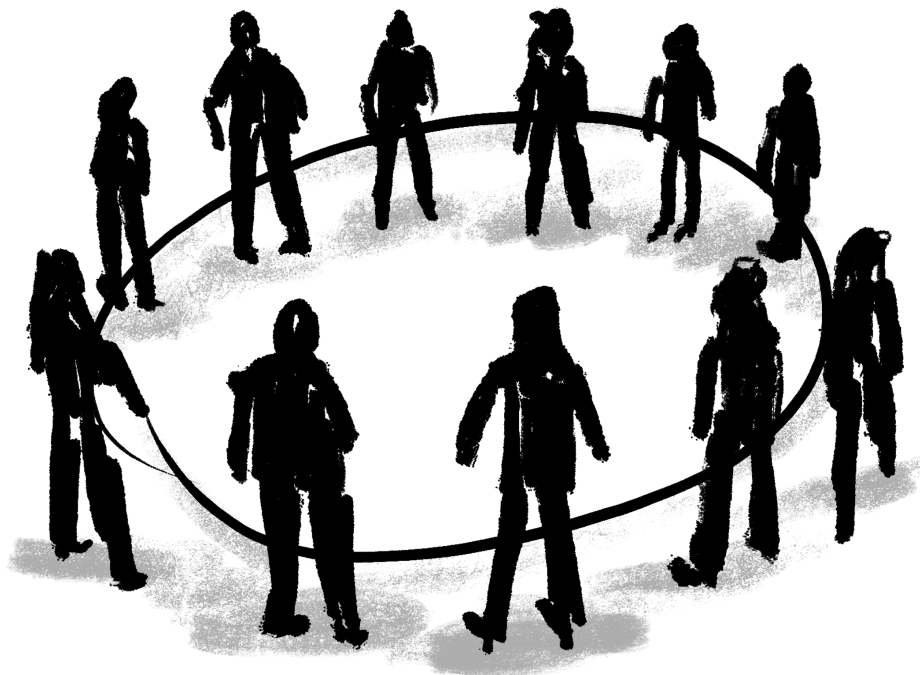
Working remotely brings about both challenges and opportunities. In the absence of in-person interactions, there is an increased importance placed upon creating human connection, outside of required meetings.

Purposefully set aside time for missed watercooler conversations, happy hours and coffee breaks.

Company culture is built through connection –these moments are crucial in building team rapport, trust, and the foundation for effective collaboration. Because remote teams do not have the same opportunities to engage in hallway or side conversations throughout the work day, it's important to schedule virtual time for casual conversation. Put something more relaxed on the calendar like: a virtual

lunch hour to take a break during a busy day, a team stretch or exercise, or just a morning “coffee break” to talk about things outside of work for a few minutes. We innately crave connection and contact with other people. Without it, work can feel very lonely.

Pro Tip: Put a virtual happy hour on the team's calendar to toast each other after a successful week, then talk about anything but work. Any time spent getting the team together to breathe, check-in, and relax is invaluable to overall team performance when you're back in work mode.



Helpful Tools and Processes in Today's Virtual World

As promised, please find our extensive curated list of tools that help make virtual work and remote team collaboration better and more successful.



Organizational/Productivity

The following tools help remote teams stay on task for maximum productivity:

BASECAMP OR ASANA | real-time communication and project management tool to keep track of your work and your team's work in a shared space.



FOCUS TO-DO | pomodoro time and task management app that helps you perform tasks efficiently.



GOOGLE DOCS | smart editing and styling tools support joint teamwork to flow smoothly and easily and keep ideas in one place. teams can work on different pages or in different docs accordingly.



GOOGLE SLIDES | interactive work templates with multiple pages to allow individual and collective work.



GOOGLE SHEETS | collaborative spreadsheets to organize and update tasks and information.



GOOGLE DRIVE | (or other cloud storage): drop all assets and work content into a shared space for easy access for all team members. use different folders to organize information.



PROCESS STREET | make checklists for your team to help you remember and keep track of all of your to-do's.



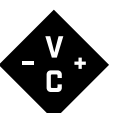
SESSIONLAB | dynamically design, organize and share workshops and training content.



TRELLO | a place for assigning work and tracking work progress using a kanban-style list-making application. assign individuals to cards to create clear to-do lists and organize priorities.



LOGITECH | all of the products you need to set up your home office and support efficient remote work.





Communication

It is critical to have clear and consistent communication while working remotely and virtually. While there is a place for email, consider implementing additional tools for improved communication:

SLACK | team messaging platform that is a smart alternative to email. it allows the team to have a shared view of work progress and purpose. *pro tip: create different threads for different topics. ex: #marketing*



ZOOM | videoconferencing platform with breakout room capabilities. it is our preferred platform for virtual meetings and workshops because it has the best features to support successful facilitation.



GOOGLE HANGOUTS | virtual meeting platform that supports text, voice, and video chat.



HOPIN | online events platform with customizable features to create engaging virtual events and meetings.



LOOM | screen recorder that allows you to video screen capture messages instead of sending long, complex emails. *note: a great instruction tool to show team members how to do something.*



OWL LABS | immersive video conferencing technology that connects virtual team members and simulates in-person interactions with a 360° smart camera, microphone and speaker.



Smart Scheduling

Coordinating meeting times with team members has always been important, but it's even more essential to get it right when working remotely. The following tools can help you do this successfully:

DOODLE | calendar scheduling system for time management and to easily coordinate one-on-one and team meetings.



WORLD TIME BUDDY | world clock, time zone converter, and online meeting scheduler to coordinate and plan across different time zones.



Take a Break

It can be easy to get dialed in on your devices and forget to take breaks. While it's great to be productive uninterrupted, it's important to incorporate breaks to maintain optimum productivity, focus, and engagement. Try these tools to avoid burnout, give your eyes a break from the screen, remind yourself to stretch your legs, and have a little fun:

ANTIRSI | a program that reminds you to take breaks to help prevent rsi (repetitive strain injury).



IRIS | bluelight filter and eye protection software to give your eyes a break.



KAHOOT | game-based learning platform for teams.



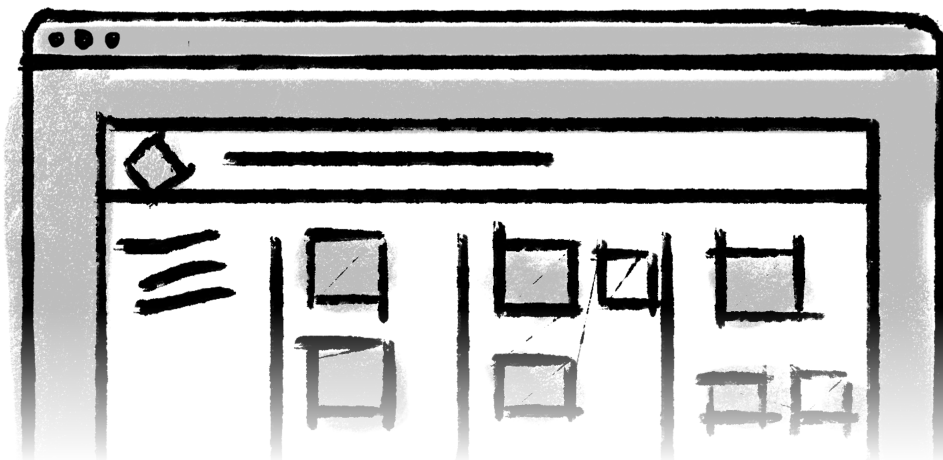
Creative Collaboration

Gathering team members together to riff creative ideas, plan, strategize, and brainstorm is invaluable. Don't lose the opportunity to have creative collaboration work sessions. Bring whiteboard brainstorm sessions to your laptop with platforms that support remote team collaboration in real-time. These tools help support in-depth or more complex meetings and workshops, such as Design Sprints:

FIGMA | collaborative design platform to design, prototype, and gather feedback in real-time in one place.

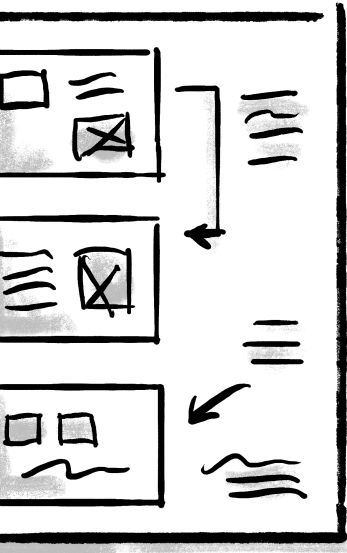


MURAL | digital whiteboard with collaborative templates for visual collaboration including planning, brainstorming, and designing.






Maximize Facilitation



We love all of the mentioned tools, but we couldn't find one that allowed us to implement some of our favorite facilitation methods. So we have been building a tool for professional facilitators and meeting hosts. Currently, it has a few nifty features:

CONTROL ROOM | coming soon! power-up your virtual meeting experience with professional facilitator activities. 

- + Share a deck with your participants without sharing your screen and which slide they can currently see.
- + Facilitate an ideation game with a large group to tap into the collective wisdom and rank the best ideas.
- + Manage breakout groups and shuffle them into different activities.
- + Read the virtual room through attention tracking
- + Continuously improve by collecting feedback on your meeting through Rose, Thorn, Bud.

Keep a lookout for its release! In the meantime, we are seeking feedback from professional facilitators. Request early access [here](#).

We created this guide to help make the transition to a virtual work environment as seamless as possible. We hope these tips and suggestions are helpful for you as you navigate the world of virtual work. While in-person work is invaluable, remote work has created unique opportunities to connect and collaborate with others in ways that haven't been possible before. We're excited to see what creations, innovations, and connections are born from the virtual work landscape. Let's continue to share insights and learnings about our experiences and help one another along the way.

Want to learn more about virtual facilitation?

Voltage Control offers [virtual services](#) including Virtual Facilitation and Virtual Meeting Design. **Please reach out at info@voltagecontrol.com for a consultation.**