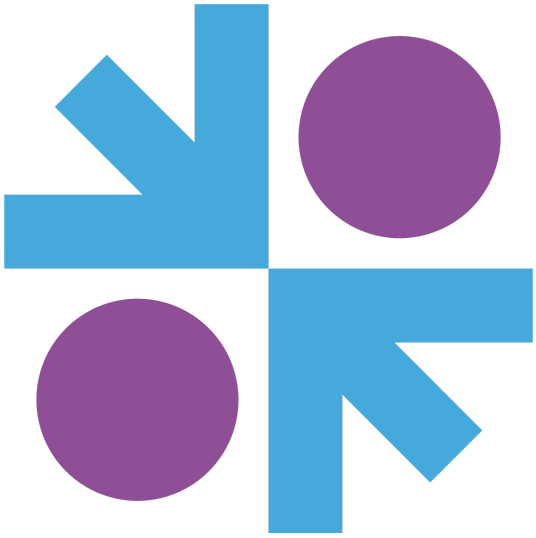
Resolution Ready

FREE GUIDE · FACILITATION

Team away day ideas and plans

How to plan a team away day that is worth the time, with sample agendas, ten session ideas and tools for the day, for teams in charities and public services.



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What an away day is for

A team away day takes people out of the everyday so they can look at their work together. The days that work have one clear purpose, decided before the venue is booked, and end with actions that have an owner and a date. Write the purpose down in one sentence and test every session against it.

If the team needs to	It usually sounds like	Best length
Plan the year ahead	We need to agree what matters most next year.	Full day
Settle after a change	We have a new manager, a new structure or several new people.	Full day
Work better together	Things are not working between us and nobody is saying why.	Half or full day
Solve one problem	We keep coming back to the same issue.	Half day
Recognise what the team has done	It has been a hard year and nobody has stopped to notice what we achieved.	Half day

Who should be there

Everyone in the team, including part time staff and anyone who works mostly on their own or out in the community. Choose a date they can all make before choosing anything else. If the team is larger than about twenty, plan for smaller groups through most of the day.

What a good away day leaves you with

1. A shared picture of the year, including what the team achieved
2. Three priorities everyone can say back
3. An owner and a first action for each priority
4. At least one change to how the team works together
5. A date to look again, already in the diary

Online and hybrid away days

A full day on screen is hard going. Split it into two sessions of about two and a half hours on different days, use a shared whiteboard instead of walls, and put people into breakout rooms of four or five for most of the work. If some people are in the room and some are online, give the online group a facilitator of their own so they are not left watching.

Before the day

1. **Agree the purpose**
   Write it in one sentence and share it with the team when you send the date.
2. **Ask the team first**
   Three short questions a fortnight before tell you what people want to talk about. The tools at the back of this guide include a sheet you can use.
3. **Choose the venue**
   Somewhere away from the usual office, with natural light, wall space, room to split into groups and step free access.
4. **Plan the running order**
   Build in a break every ninety minutes and protect the last hour for actions.
5. **Send joining details**
   The purpose, the timings, the venue, how to get there and what to bring, at least a week before.

A planning timeline

When	What to do
Eight weeks before	Agree the purpose and the date. Check the date works for part time staff.
Six weeks before	Book the venue and the facilitator. Ask about access and dietary needs.
Two weeks before	Send the three questions to the team and gather the answers.
One week before	Send the joining details and the running order.
The day before	Check the room, print anything for the walls, and walk through the plan with the facilitator.

Who does what on the day

Role	What they do
Facilitator	Runs the day, keeps to time and makes sure everyone is heard. Ideally someone from outside the team.
Manager	Takes part as a member of the team and agrees the decisions at the end.
Recorder	Captures decisions and actions as the day goes, using the tools at the back of this guide.
Everyone	Comes ready to take part, and leaves with at least one action of their own.

A sample full day

A starting point for a planning day. The four main sessions follow Thinking Differently®, our theory of change: listen, reflect, structure, respond.

Time	Session	What happens
9.30	Welcome	Purpose of the day, how it will run, and an opening activity.
10.00	Listen	The year in review, and what the people you work with have said.
11.00	Break	
11.15	Reflect	What has gone well, what has been hard, and what sits underneath both.
12.30	Lunch	
13.15	Structure	Priorities for the year ahead, agreed as a team.
14.30	Break	
14.45	Respond	Actions, owners and dates for each priority.
15.30	Close	A closing round and the date to look again.
16.00	Finish	

A sample half day

A starting point for a day to work better together or to solve one problem.

Time	Session	What happens
9.30	Welcome	Purpose and an opening activity.
9.50	The issue	What each person sees, heard without interruption.
10.40	Break	
10.55	Options	What could change, including staying as you are.
11.45	Actions	What the team will do, who owns it and by when.
12.30	Finish	

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Ten session ideas

1. The year in review

45 minutes · Whole team · In person or online

You need: A long roll of paper or a row of flipchart sheets, sticky notes in two colours and pens.

Draw a timeline of the last twelve months along a wall. Everyone adds sticky notes for the moments that mattered, above the line for highs and below for lows. Walk the timeline together and ask what the group notices.

Why use it

- It gives everyone, including newer staff, a shared picture of the year.
- It surfaces achievements that would otherwise go unmarked.

Watch for

- One person's low point taking over the session. Acknowledge it and keep walking the line.

Variation

Online, use a shared whiteboard with the months marked across the top.

2. What the people we work with say

45 minutes · Groups of 4 or 5 · In person or online

You need: Feedback printed with names removed, one set per group, and pens.

Bring real feedback from the people the team works with, such as compliments, complaints themes and survey answers, with names removed. Groups read it and pick out what they want to keep doing and what they want to change.

Why use it

- It starts the day from the experience of the people the team exists for.
- It grounds the priorities that come later.

Watch for

- Groups explaining away difficult feedback. Ask what would be true if the feedback were right.

Variation

Invite someone who uses the service to speak to the team, with their agreement and support.

3. Start, stop, continue

30 minutes · Whole team · In person or online

You need: Three flipchart sheets, sticky notes and pens.

Three sheets on the wall headed Start, Stop and Continue. Everyone adds sticky notes to each, then the group sorts them into themes and picks the three that matter most on each sheet.

Why use it

- It is quick, familiar and gives everyone a voice.
- The Stop sheet often holds the most useful notes.

Watch for

- A long list with no decisions. Insist on three from each sheet.

Variation

Add a fourth sheet headed Try, for things the team has never done.

4. The work nobody sees

30 minutes · Whole team · In person

You need: Sticky notes and pens.

Each person writes down two or three things they do that the rest of the team may not know about. Read them out or put them on the wall. Ask the group what surprised them.

Why use it

- It builds understanding of each other's workload.
- It often shows work that is duplicated or could be shared.

Watch for

- People feeling they have to justify their job. Keep it to noticing, with no judgement.

Variation

Ask people to name one thing someone else does that makes their own job easier.

5. How work moves through the team

60 minutes · Groups of 4 or 5 · In person

You need: A long sheet of paper for each group, sticky notes and marker pens.

Pick one common piece of work, such as a new referral or a funding bid. Groups map every step from start to finish on a long sheet, with who does each step and how long it waits. Then mark the places where it gets stuck.

Why use it

- It shows the bottlenecks in a way everyone can see.
- It moves the conversation from who is at fault to how the work is set up.

Watch for

- The map growing too detailed. Keep it to the main steps.

Variation

Map the same piece of work as it is now and as the team would like it to be.

6. Priorities on the wall

45 minutes · Whole team · In person or online

You need: A flipchart list of possible priorities and three sticky dots per person.

List every possible priority for the year on the wall. Each person gets three sticky dots to place on the ones that matter most. Talk about the top five, then agree three.

Why use it

- It turns a long list into a short one quickly.
- Everyone can see how the decision was reached.

Watch for

- The most senior person voting first. Ask everyone to vote at the same time.

Variation

Give each person one red dot for the priority they would drop.

7. If we were starting again

45 minutes · Groups of 4 or 5 · In person or online

You need: Flipchart paper and pens for each group.

Groups design the team from scratch around the people it serves, with no reference to how things are done now. Then compare the design with today and pick out one or two changes worth making.

Why use it

- It frees people from how things have always been done.
- It suits teams after a restructure or a change of manager.

Watch for

- Designs that need far more money or staff. Ask what could change with what the team has.

Variation

Ask groups to design the team as the people it serves would want it.

8. Our team agreement

40 minutes · Whole team · In person or online

You need: Flipchart paper and pens.

In pairs, people describe what a good working week in the team looks like. The group turns the answers into five commitments about how the team works together, written in plain words and agreed by everyone.

Why use it

- It gives the team its own standard to come back to.
- It works well after a difficult year or a change of people.

Watch for

- Commitments that are too general to act on. Ask what each one would look like on a Monday morning.

Variation

Review the agreement at the next away day and change what no longer fits.

9. Learning from one piece of work

45 minutes · Whole team · In person or online

You need: A one page summary of the piece of work and flipchart paper.

Choose one piece of work from the year that did not go to plan. Go through what happened, what helped, what got in the way and what the team would do differently, without naming anyone as responsible.

Why use it

- It builds a habit of learning without blame.
- It produces practical changes the team can make straight away.

Watch for

- The review turning into blame. Bring it back to what happened and what the team would change.

Variation

Choose a piece of work that went well and ask what made the difference.

10. A note to ourselves

15 minutes · Whole team · In person

You need: Paper, envelopes and pens.

Each person writes a short note to themselves about one thing they will do differently after the day, and seals it in an envelope. Collect the envelopes and send them back in three months.

Why use it

- It turns the day into a personal commitment.
- The note arriving three months later is a reminder of what the day was for.

Watch for

- People feeling they have to share what they wrote. The notes are private.

Variation

Online, people write the note in an email to themselves and schedule it to arrive in three months.

Making it work for everyone

1. **Keep to working hours**
   Start and finish times that work for people with caring responsibilities and part time hours.
2. **Send materials in advance**
   Anyone who needs time to process information arrives ready to take part.
3. **Offer a quiet space**
   Somewhere anyone can step away to without having to explain.
4. **Make any social part optional**
   A meal or activity afterwards is welcome, but the work of the day finishes in working hours, and nothing depends on alcohol.
5. **Include people who cannot attend**
   Ask them the three questions beforehand and send them the record afterwards.

What gets in the way

1. **Too much on the agenda**
   Four main sessions in a full day is plenty.
2. **The day runs out of time**
   A day that never reaches its actions ends with good conversations and no changes. Protect the last hour.
3. **Nothing happens afterwards**
   Book the date to look again before people leave.

After the day

Send a short written record within a week, with the priorities, the actions, the owners and the date to look again. Put the actions on the agenda of the next team meeting, and look at them again at three months.

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TOOL · BEFORE THE DAY

Away day planner

Use this to plan the day and share it with whoever is facilitating.

Team

Date

Venue

Facilitator

The purpose of the day, in one sentence

Who will be there, and anyone who cannot come

What we will ask the team beforehand

Sessions we will use

Access and dietary needs to plan for

TOOL · TWO WEEKS BEFORE

Three questions before the day

Send these to everyone in the team. Answers can be anonymous.

1. What do you most want us to talk about on the day?

2. What is going well in the team that we should keep?

3. What would make the day worth your time?

TOOL · ON THE DAY

Action log

One row for each action. Every action needs an owner and a date before people leave.

Priority	Action	Owner	By when	How we will know

TOOL · AT THE CLOSE

Feedback on the day

Ask everyone to fill this in before they leave.

	1	2	3	4	5
The purpose of the day was clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I had the chance to say what I wanted to say	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The sessions helped us get to the actions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know what happens next	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The venue worked for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1 means not at all, 5 means completely.

What was most useful about the day

What would you change next time

Resolution Ready

Resolution Ready offers independent review, training, facilitation and improvement support to local authorities, children's trusts and children's charities.

We plan and facilitate team away days, workshops and the conversations a team needs to have, in person or online. We hold the space so your group can have the conversation it needs and reach decisions of its own. Each piece of work is shaped with you and costed in advance.

Free resources that go with this guide

- Away day planning template
- Icebreakers for team meetings and workshops
- Session plan for a difficult team conversation
- Thinking Differently® prompt cards

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Free to use and share inside or outside your organisation.