

## AN AGILITY LAB RESOURCE

# Work Block Guidance

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*"The work block increased our team's productivity and happiness 5x. At a minimum. It allowed us to spend enough time together to be way more productive and, perhaps more importantly, know each other, develop a team culture, and laugh along the way. The team members said that it was one of the most gratifying teams they have worked on. You can't separate that sentiment from this way of working."*

- *Luke Hawbaker, previous TNC Conservation Portfolio Management Lead*

### OVERVIEW + FAQ

#### What is a work block?

A work block is a semi-structured meeting for focused team collaboration. We often recommend that teams start with work blocks by designating 3 uninterrupted hours a week and using that time for some combination of independent work time and real-time team collaboration, which can vary week to week depending on a team's priorities.

#### Why are work blocks useful?

When meetings about a particular project or workstream are scheduled on an ad hoc basis, it limits progress and adds significant [secondary work](#). With regular, semi-structured work blocks, teams can better maintain focus and energy, achieve more in shorter periods of time, produce higher quality work, and feel the satisfaction that comes from making clear progress.

#### Who participates in work blocks?

- Your core team: the people who are driving the work forward
- Generally, we see teams of 3-8 people who are working in similar time zones benefit most from work blocks

- Once you reach 4-hour time zone differences, you start to see some difficulty in scheduling work blocks

### **Who does not participate in work blocks?**

- Typically, those who have committed 15% or less of their time to the work will not participate in work blocks. An exception here might be having a sponsor or advisor pop in during a work block to align on a certain deliverable.

### **What do I need to do in order to make work blocks work for my team?**

#### As a team lead

- Before the work block
  - Find a time that works for everyone and send a recurring calendar item
- During the work block
  - Lead the call: keep the group moving through the agenda, answer questions as they arise
  - Prepare to clear obstacles to progress. As you'll see in the first agenda, your team members are likely to come to you with obstacles (or "blockers") and your ideal role in that conversation is to resolve or "clear" whatever is standing in the way of your team's most productive work

#### As a team member

- Protect the time on your calendar: leaving a work block for other meetings (Even brief ones! Especially brief ones!) negates the value of the time
- Show up ready to get work done. Work blocks are meant to be a focused, collaborative, supportive time to make progress on your most important work

### **What software tools can support work block implementation?**

- There is no one tool that works best for work blocks. Our overarching guidance is to use the simplest possible software solutions + to use what your team is most comfortable with.
- Microsoft Teams tends to work well for quick back-and-forths during work blocks.
- [Miro](#) and [Mural](#) are virtual whiteboard tools that teams can use for creative, collaborative work. We have come to prefer Miro at the Agility Lab.
- [Trello](#) can work well for tracking tasks and experiments using a Kanban format.

### **Do you have any example agendas that we can build from to run our own work blocks?**

We do! Scroll for more!

## WORK BLOCK EXAMPLE AGENDA - THREE HOURS

### AGENDA (3 Hours)

#### Pre-work block - outline the following:

- Team participants: *Names*
- External colleagues / Subject Matter Experts / key parties joining: *Names*
- Boards (Miro, Mural, Trello): *Links*
- Process improvements for today based on last week's retrospective: *content from previous week's retro*

#### 15 min - **Prioritize work** for this work block. Prompting questions could include:

- What can we make progress on together today that will bring us closer to our team's goals for this month?
- What deliverables can we collaboratively draft to then share for feedback?
- What is the most important work for our team right now?

#### 70 min - **Breakout rooms**: any combination of individual work and small group collaboration

#### 10 min - **Progress check**, realign for the second half.\* Prompting questions could include:

- What did you complete in this last hour?
- What do you want to work on next?
- What do you want to accomplish in this next hour?
- Is anything blocking your progress right now? (if the answer here is yes, ideally the team lead can step in to clear the obstacle)

*\*You could skip the midpoint check-in if the work requires a deeper flow state*

#### 70 min - **Breakout rooms**: any combination of individual work and small group collaboration

#### 15 min - **Progress report-out**, agree on any immediate next steps. Prompting questions could include:

- What did you accomplish during this work block?
  - Celebrate! Acknowledge your individual and collective progress with some (even small) celebration! Applause? A song? A dance? A treat? The possibilities are endless!
- What are your next steps?
- Is anything blocking your progress?
  - Again, the conversation about obstacles to progress, or "blockers," is really meant to point at clearing barriers which other team members, the team lead, or others may be able to help with
- Rapid retrospective: [I liked, I wish, I wonder](#)

## **WORK BLOCK EXAMPLE AGENDA - FULL WEEKDAY**

### **AGENDA (for a full day)**

#### **45 min - Group Meeting #1.**

- Icebreaker
- Review Trello boards
- Assignments for first work session

#### **4 hours - First Work Session** (includes lunch / break).

- Consider including progress checks periodically (can use probing questions outlined in 3 hour example agenda)

#### **45 min - Group Meeting #2**

- Demos: What did you accomplish during this work block?
  - Celebrate! Acknowledge your individual and collective progress with some (even small) celebration! Applause? A song? A dance? A treat? The possibilities are endless!
- Assignments for second work session

#### **1 hour - Second Work Session**

#### **45 min - Group Meeting #3**

- Demos
- Share blockers and brainstorm - anything to get unstuck?
- Anything for team members in XX timezone to continue after this call?
- Conduct a retrospective: [I liked, I wish, I wonder](#)