Lucid Facilitator's Guide

QUARTERLY STRATEGIC REFRESH MEETING

During this meeting, teams review their strategic progress and establish targets for the next 90 days. Part retrospective, part working session, and part time-out, running a Quarterly Refresh makes sure your organization's strategy stays present in everyone's mind, up-to-date with changes in your environment, and relevant to everyday operations.

Use this template as a starting place when designing your Quarterly Refresh, and adapt the agenda to fit your team.

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INTRODUCTION

Your team just completed 90 days of work in pursuit of your goals. Some things went exactly as planned, some went better than you'd hoped. Other moments weren't so great. Now that the experience is behind you, it's time to reflect, then take what you've learned and use it to set goals for the next 90 days.

> "We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience."
>
> –John Dewey

The **Quarterly Refresh is a core practice** for every team that seeks to drive strategic execution.

During this meeting, your team will:

- Reconnect with your organization's long term strategy
- Review progress and key learnings from the past quarter
- Discuss what worked well and what didn't
- Set reality-based targets for the quarter ahead

This template provides a loose framework for leading a Quarterly Refresh.

If you have the time, consider adding additional topics to the agenda. The quarterly meeting can be a good time for the leadership team to evaluate key personnel, for example, and a shared meal or two creates opportunities for deeper discussion and relationships.

Keep the discussion structured but not rigid. Approach this meeting as a team of colleagues working together to drive your business. This should feel like an intense meeting, and not so much like an orchestrated workshop or a self-indulgent boondoggle.

Scheduling and Logistics Tips

Schedule far in advance.

We recommend **scheduling your Quarterly Refresh meetings for a full year in advance**. Ideally, the schedule for these meetings will be set as part of the annual strategic planning session. Alternatively, schedule next quarter's Refresh at the close of the current meeting.

This approach creates fixed strategic milestones, making it absolutely clear when a quarter's targets will be up for review. There's nothing like a deadline to drive results!

The other reason to schedule well in advance: the Quarterly Refresh requires everyone's participation and forces the team to take time out from day-to-day work. This works when the meeting is firmly rooted on the calendar. If you try to schedule it on short notice, however, it's almost certain that something "urgent" will make it impossible to find an open time.

Plan for at least 4 and up to 8 hours.

The first half of the meeting is spent reflecting and learning. The second half is spent planning.

It's possible to spend just 2 hours on each half and complete the meeting in an afternoon. This doesn't play to our brains' natural strengths, however, and can lead to inferior results.

In this meeting, you're asking the team to reflect on their experience, pull out key learnings, and turn that into a realistic yet exciting plan for the quarter ahead. If you rush it, you'll get whatever comes to mind in the moment, which will say more about how they're feeling that day than what the organization needs to succeed.

Instead, we recommend breaking the meeting into an afternoon and a morning session. The first afternoon is spent reviewing results and discussing what the team learned in the past quarter. Don't make any decisions the first day; just reflect. Then, the group should enjoy an informal meal together.

The morning session follows a full night's rest and a healthy breakfast. This gives everyone the evening to think about what they discussed the day before, and time to start forming their own ideas. Research also shows people make more nuanced and logical decisions when they're well rested and well fed, qualities you want to cultivate when it's time to plan the next quarter.

Get out of the building.

Your goal is to step away from your normal operations and gain perspective. This is easier to accomplish when you literally change your perspective. Off-site meetings give you a chance to break up office patterns that may be inhibiting collaboration. If your team is small like ours, consider encouraging informal and open dialogue by choosing a relaxed space with comfortable seating and fabulous food.

Keep the group as small as possible.

Many leaders see a strategic off-site as a chance to groom or even reward promising employees. Others bring along experts from their team to provide back-up for what are sure to be challenging discussions.

If your organization needs a broad infusion of fresh ideas, you should absolutely include a lot of participants - in a separate meeting dedicated to that goal. The Quarterly Refresh is primarily a decision-making meeting involving the leaders who will be held responsible for executing the plans they make. If needed, include large group input sessions, customer surveys, expert training, and any other outside consultation your organization needs **as part of your preparation** for the Quarterly Refresh. **Keep this meeting focused and limited to the leadership team.**

Do you need an outside facilitator?

Ideally, this meeting should be relatively informal, but informal does not mean unstructured or easy. To succeed, the team needs to take a hard look at the past Quarter's performance, then create a workable plan for the quarter ahead.

If any of the following situations are true for you, consider bringing in an outside facilitator to help with the Quarterly Refresh.

- It's your first ever Quarterly Refresh, and you want to make sure it goes well.
- Your last Quarterly Refresh went poorly or failed to yield good results.
- You have more than 10 people on your leadership team.
- You want to participate fully in the discussion without having to monitor the process at the same time.

AGENDA

GOAL

Review results from the past quarter and plan for the next quarter.

DURATION

4 to 8 hours

1. Welcome. Connect.
2. Review Agenda
3. Review State of the Strategy
4. Discuss Key Learnings and Insights
5. Plan the Next Quarter
6. Confirm the Plan
7. Close

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Preparing For the Meeting

Plan Any Pre-Meeting Work

If your organization would benefit from training, management consulting, or any other work sessions before the Quarterly Refresh, make sure to plan for these to conclude at least a week in advance of the meeting. This will give leaders time to reflect on what they learn so they can put it to use during the Refresh.

Secure a Location and Supplies

Regardless of whether you're on-site or off-site, you will need:

- A projector or shared screen to review reports and share plans
- A way to post and collaborate on ideas; either a whiteboard or an online collaborative meeting space
- A way to share your existing strategic plan. If you meet in person, consider printing copies for everyone.
- Blank planning sheets for the coming quarter
- Food and drink

Prepare Past Quarter Results

Every leader prepares a report detailing performance numbers and the results from any priority activities for the past quarter. Leaders include short comments about off-track items, explaining the performance gap and what actions are being taken or proposed to address them.

These reports need to be available in time for everyone to read them before the meeting. If your team follows the recommended cadence of leadership team meetings, there will be no surprises. These reports simply "button-up" the results you've been monitoring every week into an easily reviewed summary.

You won't be reading these reports during the meeting; that would be a waste of the team's time. Reading them beforehand will help everyone have that information current, and give them a chance to form questions and ideas to improve on the past quarter's results.

During the meeting, you will want to review the high-level results from the past 3+ quarters and the open issues list. Make sure you can easily access high-level performance numbers and the issues list during the meeting, just as you would for a Weekly Leadership Team meeting.

Refine the Agenda

Decide on any changes you want to make to the agenda. Then, set specific start and end times for each agenda item.

Prepare the Call to Action

Instead of offering a bland welcome, the senior leader will open the meeting with a call to action, or "burning platform," that sets the tone.

What's the big opportunity or urgent challenge the team needs to rally around this quarter? Why is this the time to pull together and invest in a refreshed plan? How will their efforts today benefit the organization at large and them personally?

The senior leader should prepare a short introduction to create energy and focus at the start of the meeting. Plan for 5 minutes or less.

Distribute the Agenda, Reports, and Final Instructions

One week before the meeting, send the final details to the leadership team. Include the meeting agenda and logistics.

Finally, ask every leader to prepare for the meeting by:

1. Reviewing all past quarter reports and preparing questions. Again, you will not waste time reading reports during the meeting. These must be reviewed in advance.
2. Reflecting on past quarter results.
3. Preparing to share their personal highlights, key learnings, and goals for the Refresh. They do not need to create a presentation. Each person will simply take up to 5 minutes to share their insights.
4. Preparing to make plans for the next quarter.

We've included several questions that teams find helpful for prompting reflection and encouraging dialogue at the end of this guide. Consider including any that speak to you in the preparation instructions.

During the Meeting

1 Welcome. Connect.

Purpose	Check in and share goals.
Outcomes	Everyone's past quarter insights List of goals for the planning session
Duration	5 minutes for the opening + 5 minutes per person for sharing insights

Instructions

The senior leader starts the meeting with the call to action. Then, the team goes around the room and takes turns sharing:

- A top victory from the past quarter
- 2 or 3 highlights from their team
- 1 or 2 key learnings
- His or her personal goals for the Refresh; what they most want to accomplish by the end

Usually, we recommend never starting a go-around with the most senior leader. In this case, though, starting with the senior leader has two benefits:

- It's a natural segue from the opening, since he or she is already presenting to the group and has already laid out their big idea for the day.
- The senior leader can be coached in advance to model this go-around.

Modeling is especially important for go-arounds, because it gives everyone an example of how long they are expected to speak and the kind of content the group expects to hear.

During the go-around, one person acts as a scribe and records each person's goals where everyone can see them.

2 Review Agenda

Purpose	Confirm or revise agenda
Outcome	Finalized agenda
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Go over the agenda as a group, and update it if necessary. During the review, check for these things:

Do the times work for everyone? Sometimes people need to step out for a call or deal with other things, and you can adjust the agenda to work around these requirements.

Will the agenda achieve the meeting goals? Refer to the list of everyone's goals captured in the previous agenda item. For each goal, identify where it should be covered in the existing agenda. If a goal doesn't fit, discuss whether this should be added to the agenda, or added to a Parking Lot for discussion in a separate meeting.

3 Review State of the Strategy

Purpose	Reconnect with the strategy
Outcome	Everyone knows the existing strategy and past performance results
Duration	30 minutes

Instructions

This agenda item devotes time to reconnecting with your organization's long-term strategy, and remembering how that strategy informed where you are today.

To quote the wisdom of a Saturday Night Live alumnae:

> "The only thing we can depend on in life is that everything changes. The seasons, our partners, what we want and need. We hold hands with our high school friends and swear to never lose touch, and then we do. Change is the only constant. Your ability to navigate and tolerate change and its painful uncomfortableness directly correlates to your happiness and general well-being."
> ~ Amy Poehler

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Now your team will take a look at the strategy you developed in the past, when you were a different organization and knew less than you know today. **This is not a time to debate the merits of the strategy**—that's coming, never fear—but rather to make sure everyone connects with what the strategy actually says and the results it was originally intended to inspire.

First, spend 15 minutes reviewing the overall strategy map.

Read the mission, vision, and core values, and discuss how these informed the strategic priorities you established in the past quarter.

Then, spend 10 minutes reviewing the high level metrics and the progress on proirities for the past 3 quarters. Notice which items exceeded expectations, and which fell short.

Finally, review the open issues list. Notice the issues that have remained on this list for multiple weeks without resolution, and consider how the overall strategy, measurements, and priorities impact these issues.

4 Discuss Key Learnings and Insights

Purpose	To create a shared understanding of how well the current strategy is working
Outcomes	Documented key learning and insights
Duration	45+ minutes

Instructions

For smaller groups that meet regularly (and this includes most leadership and executive teams) this should be an exploratory open discussion.

Now that you've reviewed the larger strategy, here are some questions you might use to start the discussion:

- What do our key learnings tell us about our approach?
- What's going well and why?
- What is not going well and why?

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- What's changed in our world in the past 90 days? This might include changes with competitors, industry or cultural trends, unforeseen obstacles, and more.
- What do we need to adjust in our approach for next quarter?

Assign one person to capture key insights. To help organize these key points, consider either creating separate lists or using tags to categorize points as Successes, Learnings, Issues, or Parking Lot items.

Facilitation Note

If you are engaged to help facilitate this meeting, resist the urge to overly structure this part of the discussion. This is an opportunity for the team to reflect on and build from their shared experience, and you don't want too much technique to get in the way. The larger challenge is managing dysfunction; watch for people who dominate the discussion, tangents, and people who check out.

Some light-weight structures that may be useful include:

- **Categorizing Insights:** Decide in advance the kinds of insights you'll capture (Success, Learning, etc.) and set up dedicated flip charts for each to guide the discussion.
- **Breakout Groups:** Ask each smaller group to discuss the chosen questions, then nominate one member from each group to share these insights with the whole team. Then lead the whole group in a discussion on the insights shared from the smaller groups.

Bringing the Discussion to a Close

This kind of conversation can expand to fill any time you give it. To keep this from becoming enervating, make sure to start wrapping up the discussion 10 minutes before the scheduled end time. We recommend closing this discussion with a checkpoint (highlighting the progress made in the meeting thus far) and a final go-around.

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For example, you might say:

> "We have 10 minutes left before we break for dinner. It's time to start wrapping this up, so let's take a look at what we've covered so far.
>
> We began today by sharing highlights from the past quarter and our goals for the meeting. After that, we reviewed the agenda, then took a critical look at our long-term strategy and past performance. Based on all that, we've just spent the past 45 minutes capturing important insights that will help us make a great plan for next quarter. Tomorrow, we'll build that plan.
>
> I'm sure we'll get a chance to talk more about this over the break, but before that, let's go around the room and share what we've learned.
>
> When it's your turn, can you **please share the one most important thing you're taking away from the conversation so far**?"

For this go-around, do not start with the most senior leader. After everyone shares their most important take-away, take a break.

Take A Long Break

As mentioned in the scheduling notes, we recommend running these first four agenda items in an afternoon, then breaking for a shared dinner.

Sharing a meal at this point gives everyone an opportunity to continue discussions that were in full steam, or alternatively, a chance to unwind from a tense conversation and enjoy each other's company.

To create the best plan for the next quarter in the second half of the meeting, the team will need to arrive refreshed and eager to work together. Use this break to help make that happen.

5 Plan the Next Quarter

Purpose	Establish the performance targets and priorities for the next quarter
Outcomes	Documented targets and priorities Action items for any immediate tasks
Duration	2+ hours

Instructions

Start by welcoming everyone back, celebrating your progress so far, then review the agenda for the day. Refer back to the list of goals the team shared during the first agenda item, and check off any that the group feels are done.

The next few hours will be spent creating the plan for the upcoming quarter, which will largely be guided by the planning format the organization used last quarter.

Before the group dives into the details, take a moment to reconnect with a quick go-around. Starting at one end of the room, ask each person to:

> "Please answer in one word or short phrase: How are you feeling about tackling the planning in front of us today?"

Once everyone has shared, begin the planning work.

Despite all the time spent on reflection, this meeting is a Quarterly Refresh, not a full-on strategy re-do. The plans you create for the upcoming quarter will probably look a lot like the plans you made last quarter. The target numbers may change, and the priority objectives should change, but the overall format and nature of the plan should not.

There are a number of ways to lead this part of the discussion.

Larger groups may wish to break up into related functional areas and work their part of the plan separately. You can then bring these groups back together after an hour and merge everyone's drafts into a shared plan.

Smaller teams may wish to first define the priority objectives as a group, and then update the target metrics.

If you'd like a more structured approach, we recommend using the Stop, Start, Continue method to kickstart your planning.

How to Lead Stop, Start, Continue

Step 1: Setup

Create three blank lists labeled Start, Stop, and Continue. Explain that Start is for brand new initiatives. Stop will include activities and initiatives the organization is doing that aren't delivering value. Continue should include those initiatives that are working and should be carried forward on the new plan.

Step 2: Silent Brainstorming

Give everyone a stack of sticky notes (or a blank electronic document) and ask them to write one activity or initiative on each note that they feel should either be stopped, started, or continued in the new plan.

Give everyone 10 to 15 minutes to write individually in silence.

Step 3: Listing

Going around the room, have everyone place one idea at a time in the Stop Doing category. Each person reads the note aloud as they place it in the Stop Doing category, and shares one sentence about why they put it there. There is no discussion at this point. Anyone else who has the same note for that category should add theirs too, making a stack of duplicate notes.

Go around the room sharing all the things the group feels they should Stop Doing. When no one has any more notes for that category, move on to list all the things the group wants to Continue Doing.

Finally, share all the items the group feels they should Start Doing.

Step 4: Review Results

When all the notes are posted, take a moment to observe. Ask the group:

- What patterns or themes did you notice here?
- What surprised you?
- What obvious conclusions do we share that we can just build into the plan? Let's get these written down and out of the way.
- Now, what's left that we don't necessarily agree on and that we need to discuss?
  This is where you'll spend the rest of your time.

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Continue working as a group until you feel you've got the next quarter's plan well drafted.

Then, take a 15 to 20 minute break before coming back to confirm the plan and wrap up.

But what if the long term strategy sucks?

If you found in the previous discussions that the whole strategy just isn't working, then you have a bigger problem to solve. Ditch this agenda and figure out how you're going to tackle strategic planning afresh.

6

Confirm the Plan

Purpose	Check the plan for completeness and clarify next steps
Outcomes	Completed draft plan Documented messages for shareholders Actions list for next steps
Duration	30-45 minutes

Instructions

After the break, bring everyone back to confirm the plan**.**

Post the draft plan where everyone can see it and check:

- Are the new target metrics correct?
- Are the priorities for next quarter listed correctly?

When the group is satisfied with the plan, review and update the actions list. **Create an action item with a due date and an assigned owner for**:

- **Updating internal records with the new plan information.** For example, you will want to track the new metrics in your Weekly Leadership Meeting.
- **Sharing plan details with stakeholders.** Decide which messages need to be shared with employees, board members, customers, and other stakeholder groups, and assign action items to those responsible for this communication.
- **Any other immediate tasks** needed to put the new plan into effect.

7 Closing

Purpose	Make sure all meeting business is complete
Outcomes	Final thoughts and appreciations Meeting evaluation
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

You've completed the plan, drafted the actions list, and you're feeling very ready to be done. Before you leave, take one final check on the original goals list. Were all of the goals met? If so, hurrah! If not, ask the group if the remaining goals need to be addressed now, or if action items should be created for addressing them in the future.

Then, check to see if anyone has anything else they need to say. Ask:

> "Is there anything at all that needs to be asked or said before we leave today?"

Next, take a moment to thank the group, and for the group to acknowledge each other's contributions. Ask:

> "These meetings can be challenging. Is there anyone here that you'd like to acknowledge for their contribution or for something they did that you admired?"

Then, end as you began the day with a one-phrase close.

> "Using one word or phrase, please share: How are you feeling now about our plans for next quarter?"

This last one-phrase close is especially important for the senior leader to hear, as it will quickly reveal an issues that they need to follow up with afterwards. Hopefully, all you'll hear is wild enthusiasm. :)

Once everyone shares their final one-phrase thought, end the meeting.

After the Meeting

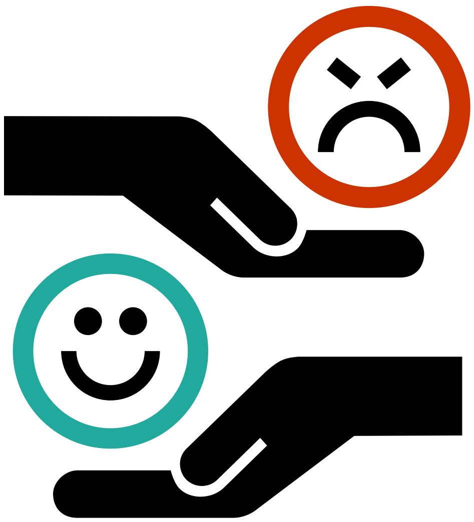
Send out the follow-up email, which makes sure everyone gets their action items and a full report in their email, even if they couldn't attend the meeting.

We also recommend surveying your team for feedback about the meeting. The Quarterly Refresh is part of the strategic execution habit that you'll repeat every 90 days, so it's important to run it in a way that works for your team and your organization.

The simplest way to collect feedback is by using an anonymous electronic survey. The anonymous survey built into Lucid Meetings provides a good model. It asks two simple questions, known as Plus/Delta.

- What worked well in this meeting that we should make sure to keep for next time?
- What should we consider changing for future meetings?

The Lucid survey goes out automatically, but whether your survey is automated or not, you will still need to explicitly ask your team to provide feedback. Most people ignore surveys they aren't personally asked to complete, since they may not expect that anyone will actually read their answers.



QUESTIONS THAT ENCOURAGE REFLECTION

The questions you ask change the answers you receive. Here are a selection of questions others have used successfully to guide their preparation and shape their discussions in the Quarterly Refresh.

Questions About the Quarter in General

- Are you proud of our finished work? If yes, what made it great? If no, what was wrong or missing?
- Did we get the results we wanted and did it make an impact?
- What did you learn about working with our customers?
- What important decisions were made during this quarter?
- What compromises were made? (Things that might look like a mistake but were done for a reason.)
- How well did we embody our values as an organization? What are some examples that show people either living or not living our values?

Questions About What Worked

- What was the most gratifying or impactful result from the past quarter?
- What did we do well, that if we don’t discuss we might forget?
- What helps us to be successful as a leadership team?
- Which of our methods or processes worked particularly well?
- Where did we get lucky? What can we do to ensure we succeed if we aren’t so lucky next time?

Questions About Challenges

- What was the biggest impediment?

- What was painful but necessary?
- What’s still keeping you awake at night? What did we leave unresolved?
- What still puzzles you?

Questions About Take-Aways

- What advice would you give yourself if you were to go back to the start of the quarter? To the start of the year?
- What should we have learned from this quarter a year from now?
- Are there any lessons for you personally?
- What else could we do better next quarter?

Question About the Future

- What do we need to accomplish in the next quarter? Why?
- What difference will it make to individuals, and to the organization, if we achieve these goals?
- What should our target numbers be next quarter? What targets would be realistic? What targets should we set as a stretch goal?
- What do we need to do to better embody our values as an organization? As a leadership team?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

These books include guidance on running leadership meetings as part of a larger leadership and management approach.

"Scaling Up: How a Few Companies Make It...and Why the Rest Don't (Rockefeller Habits 2.0)" by Verne Harnish
https://smile.amazon.com/Scaling-Up-Companies-Rockefeller-Habits/dp/0986019526

Verne Harnish also published a dedicated bonus chapter including a sample agenda for the Quarterly meeting here:
https://scalingup.com/Scaling_Up_Strategic_Planning_Preparing_and_Leading_the_Planning_Process.pdf

"Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" by Gino Wickman
https://smile.amazon.com/Traction-Get-Grip-Your-Business/dp/1936661837

On the Web

Recognize and Plan for Results – The Quarterly Meeting
http://gicoaches.com/recognize-and-plan-for-results-%E2%80%93-the-quarterly-meeting/

How to Make a Big Impact at Your Next Quarterly Meeting
https://www.bates-communications.com/articles-and-newsletters/articles-and-newsletters/bid/27393/how-to-make-a-big-impact-at-your-next-quarterly-meeting

Off-Sites that Work

https://hbr.org/2006/06/off-sites-that-work

Related Templates and Blog Posts

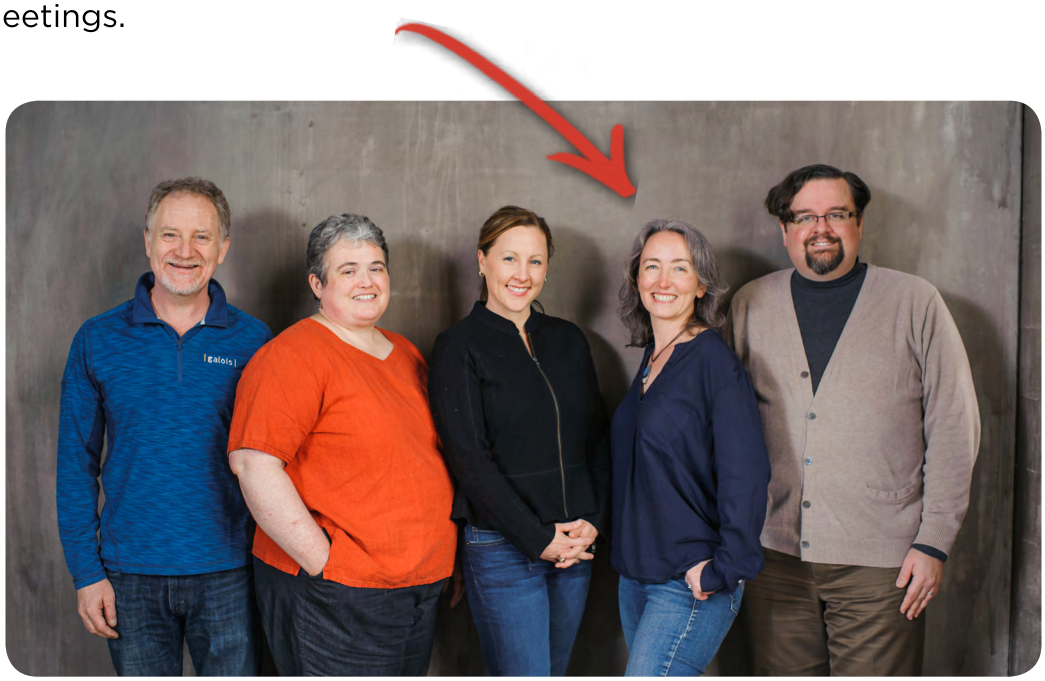
The 4 Meeting Agendas that Drive Strategic Execution
http://blog.lucidmeetings.com/blog/4-meeting-agendas-that-drive-strategic-execution

The Strategic Plan Refresher by Paul Axtell
https://www.lucidmeetings.com/templates/strategic-plan-refresher

The Complete Toolkit for Strategic Planning with Remote Teams
https://www.lucidmeetings.com/templates/complete-toolkit-strategic-planning-remote-teams

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This template was designed and produced by Lucid Meetings founder **Elise Keith**, with support from the fabulous team at Lucid Meetings.



See more of Elise's work on running effective meetings here: https://www.lucidmeetings.com/authors/elise-keith

Learn more about Lucid Meetings on our website.