



# INTELLIGENCE

ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTAL RISK POOLS

## Make Room for Your Pool's Most Important Work

*Juliet Funt*

**B**usyness has a way of disguising itself as productivity. A full calendar looks like commitment. An overflowing inbox feels like responsibility. A day packed with calls, updates and quick questions suggests work is humming along.

Yet we can recognize the truth underneath all that motion: the pace is relentless, but accomplishments don't always follow, and outcomes do not always improve. People are working hard but still feel overwhelmed by competing priorities, with little time left for the work that creates actual progress.



**This kind of disconnect is rarely a motivation or productivity problem — it's a friction problem.** Friction lives inside everyday routines. Back-to-back meetings leave no time to think. Emails and notifications cause constant interruption. Poorly defined deadlines hijack priorities. Communication habits inflate small tasks into long threads and extra meetings.

Over time, friction crowds out strategic thinking, thoughtful decision-making, and work that supports long-term pool success and high-quality member service. A better approach is to remove what is unnecessary and create margins for higher-quality work. Outcomes improve when obstacles are removed, not when pressure is added.

For pools, removing friction is about making room for what matters most: identifying trends, anticipating member needs, creating novel solutions, and focusing on work that reduces risk before it escalates. When friction goes unaddressed, these priorities are often the first to be squeezed out.

The following techniques focus on practical ways to reduce friction built into your workday, from meetings and communication habits to how you respond to urgency. Each one is designed to help individuals and teams reclaim time and attention, so meaningful pool work can take priority.

## From the Executive Director

People in pooling have a natural inclination to “do more.” We want better claims interactions, improved risk management programs and a snazzy stewardship report to share with members. Our commitment to members, combined with a highly collaborative nature, creates a relentless pace of work and demand for quality.

Sometimes, it feels like no amount of coffee or pump-up playlists can keep up. With so much going on, there is limited chance for reflection, strategy or the kind of deep thinking that drives meaningful results.

That's why [our residency this year](#) is focused on operational efficiency and white space. Helping pool teams reclaim time and mental clarity is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen member outcomes. When teams have space to work, think, plan and act intentionally, pools operate more smoothly, decisions improve and member service thrives.

Throughout the year, we'll provide practical ways to identify where energy is being lost, reduce unnecessary friction and build habits that protect focus for high-impact work. Through surveys, self-paced programs, workshops and other resources, pools will learn to prioritize thoughtfully, respond to urgency strategically and foster a culture that balances action with reflection.

If you invest in residency work with us, your team will have the headspace to tackle the work that matters most for your pool and its members — without burning out along the way.

We're thrilled to be working with our 2026 Resident, Juliet Funt, and we look forward to seeing the difference her guidance makes in your pool's focus, flow and impact.



Ann Gergen  
Executive Director

## Intentionally Create White Space

Think of your online calendar, filled with meetings and deadlines. All those color-blocked invitations that keep you running from one thing to the next. When you finally have an afternoon that's unscheduled, you probably think, "Finally, I can get some real work done." Welcome to white space.

Intentional use of white space means building pauses into the workday, such as time between meetings, blocks of the day reserved for focused work, or even the moment you

give yourself to think before responding with your reaction to an already long email chain.

White space is not idle time. **It's the margin that allows high-quality thinking and meaningful work to happen.**

For many teams, the first benefit of intentionally creating white space is a notable sense of relief. Stepping out of constant motion — even for a brief period in the day — reduces fatigue and lowers stress, creating the conditions for improved outcomes.

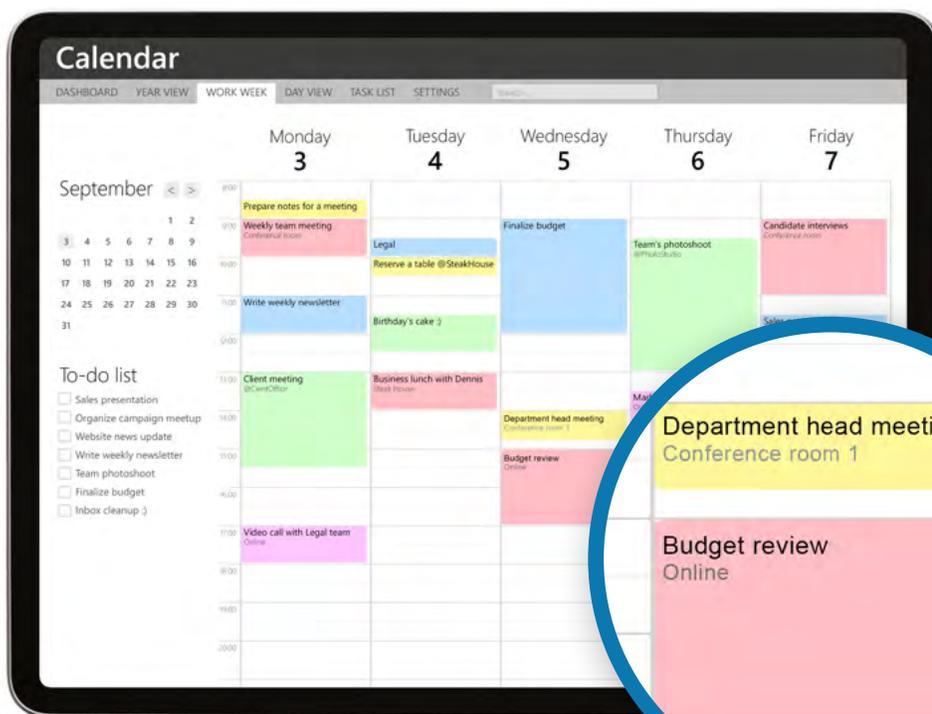
White space supports clearer thoughts, better decisions and stronger follow-through.

When people are no longer reacting to back-to-back demands, their thinking shifts. Ideas surface more easily, problems untangle and mental bandwidth returns. White space allows the mind to do what it does best: connect dots, recognize patterns and work through complexity that packed schedules and constant urgency make difficult.

One practical place to reclaim white space is between meetings on your calendar. When meetings are stacked back-to-back, the blocks blur together, leaving no room to think, reset or prepare. Without the white space between meetings, reflection disappears, action items pile up and stress rises — not because people are

careless, but because the day leaves no room to close one conversation before starting the next.

Even five or ten minutes between meetings can prevent downstream confusion, reduce overwhelm, and improve both performance and quality.



A simple structure helps make the most of time between meetings:



### LOOK BACK

Meetings often end with assignments or implied next steps. Without time to transition, they rarely reach real closure.

#### When you finish a meeting, take a minute to:

- Capture action items
- Send the email that prevents any unclarity
- Note what worked and what did not



### LOOK WITHIN

Back-to-back meetings make it easy to lose awareness of personal needs. Briefly stepping away between commitments helps reduce your fatigue and restore focus.

#### Check in:

- Do I need water or food?
- Do I need to move by body for a minute?
- Am I reaching for my phone out of habit?



### LOOK FORWARD

Preparation improves presence. Even a short planning pause can change the tone and outcome of a conversation.

#### Take a few minutes to:

- Define the purpose of the next meeting
- Consider who you are meeting with
- Decide how you want to show up
- Identify the outcome you want to achieve



### END BEFORE YOU END

To preserve white space consistently, meetings must start to wrap up early. For instance, for a 45-minute meeting, begin closing at minute 40. Work to finalize next steps before ending, then protect your time to transition.

Building white space into the day doesn't slow work down — it sharpens it. Pausing between tasks and meetings allows clarity to emerge, so attention goes to the work that drives tangible results.

Consider how you can build white space into your day:

- Take 30 minutes in the morning to quietly sip a cup of coffee and settle in.
- As a team, commit to scheduling meetings for 45 instead of 60 minutes, so people have a chance to stretch and regroup before moving onto the next thing.
- Honor lunch breaks.
- Make it a practice to take ten deep breaths before responding to yet another email about that issue that keeps showing up.

## White space

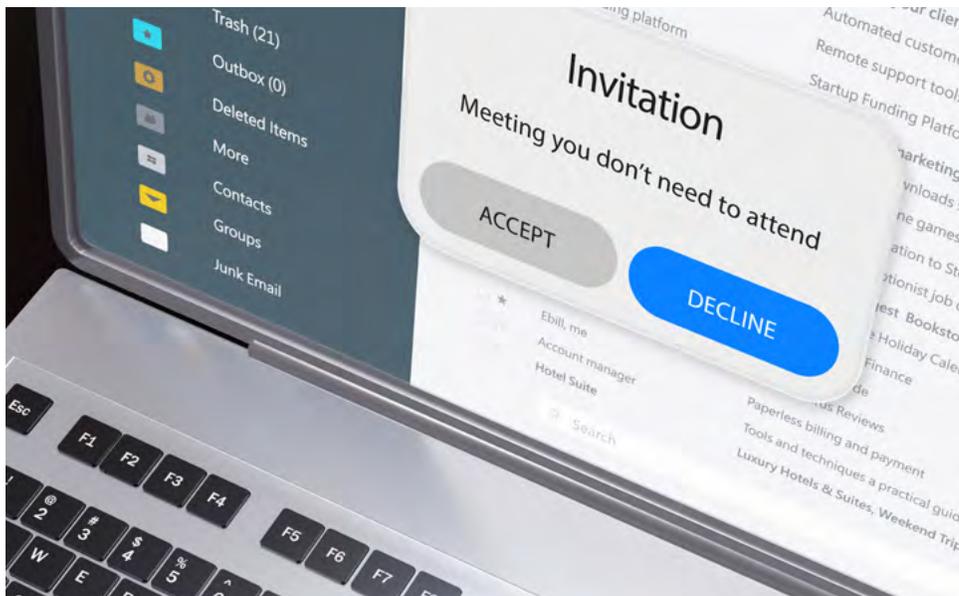
## strengthens

## outcomes by giving

## work — and people —

## room to breathe.

# Right-Size Meetings



Most organizations don't have a meeting problem. They have an inclusion reflex.

We want to keep people informed. We want to avoid leaving anyone out. The result is more meetings, more attendees and less efficiency. Calendars fill. Work expands. Stress and frustration build. Time is spent maintaining motion instead of advancing priorities.

The answer is not eliminating meetings altogether. Meetings can be valuable. **The answer is meeting discipline: choosing meetings deliberately, inviting the right people and allowing others to opt out without penalty.**

The first step is to give people permission to decline meetings (when it makes sense). In effective workplaces, people decline meetings when they do not add unique value. That autonomy reduces duplication of efforts and increases engagement in the remaining meetings — which signals that meeting focus is a shared responsibility, not a personal failing.

Before accepting a meeting invitation, ask:

- Will this meeting add value to my work?
- Will I add unique value to the meeting?

If the answer is no to both, declining is often the most practical and responsible option.

If a meeting feels unproductive, ask yourself:

- Am I redundant with others here?
- Is the purpose of this meeting unclear?
- Is the topic important, but I am not the right participant?

Then act on what you learn. If the issue is redundancy, suggest a smaller group next time.

If the issue is clarity, ask for it. If you're not needed, follow up with the organizer and step out of future meetings without guilt. These course corrections prevent unnecessary meetings from repeating.

Pay attention to which meetings you attend — and to your attention while you're in them. Be more selective about what you say yes to, and as a team, hold one another accountable for focused, effective meetings.

## Productive meetings

respect time as

much as they

respect people.



# Reduce Communication Drag

Communication habits quietly shape how time and attention are used each day. Many teams feel buried by messages, updates and notifications.

When updates and messages happen nonstop, focus fractures and meaningful work gets squeezed. Reducing drag doesn't require a sweeping culture change. It starts with communication norms.

Norms are agreements about how work happens. **A few well-chosen communication norms can reduce friction immediately and help pool teams protect time for deeper work.**

As a rule of thumb, I recommend using asynchronous communication tools for information sharing. Asynchronous communication shares information without requiring an immediate response or synchronized schedules. It allows people to engage when they are ready, protecting focus time and reducing unnecessary meetings.

Some examples include:

- Recorded updates instead of live status meetings
- Comments in shared documents

- Voice memos for nuanced explanations
- Task updates in project management tools

Clearly established response time expectations are critical to the asynchronous communication norm. One of the primary drivers of communication drag is the assumption that messages require immediate attention. Each quick response reinforces that expectation and trains others to interrupt focus again next time.

Resetting response time norms helps protect attention without slowing work down. When people know they are not expected to reply instantly, they can engage more thoughtfully and with less disruption.

Small shifts help reset the pattern:

- Avoid responding immediately to non-urgent messages.
- Batch communication at set times during the day.
- Treat true urgency as an exception, not the default.

I also recommend norms that shift from push to pull communication. Push

communication is the act of sending information to others, increasing disruption and distraction. Pull communication stores information in a shared place people can access when needed, restoring autonomy and reducing interruption.

To make the shift:

- Centralize routine updates.
- Reduce company-wide emails.
- Use system settings to minimize notifications.

When communication becomes more intentional and norms are clear, teams spend less time reacting and more time thinking, planning and moving important work forward.

**Communication**

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**norms reduce noise,**

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**which leads to**

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**clearer thinking.**

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## Break Fire Drill Culture

Few things crowd out meaningful work faster than constant urgency. Instead of working proactively, teams find themselves reacting to the loudest request in the moment. This fire drill mindset piles new demands onto already full workloads, pulling attention away from priorities that require steady focus and thoughtful judgment.

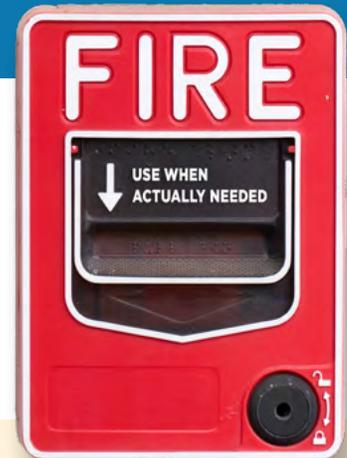
When people respond instantly, adrenaline takes over. Clarification is skipped. Stress rises. Work expands beyond what is needed, often without improving outcomes.

**For pools, this kind of reactivity comes at a real cost.** Time meant for strategic planning, building member connections, evaluating risk trends, developing new approaches to risk mitigation, and other stewardship strategies is instead fragmented.

The goal is not to eliminate urgency altogether. Some situations genuinely require fast action. The goal is to interrupt the reflex to react to everything as an emergency and insert a brief pause between stimulus and response. That pause creates enough space to protect

the work that keeps pools stable, responsive and resilient.

Use a three-step response when you're faced with a sense of urgency coming from outside your own work domain:



### 1 GET PRESENT

Urgency is contagious. When someone else is frantic, it is easy to mirror their pace and make it your own. A short pause restores perspective and allows emotional intensity to settle.

#### Ask:

- Is this actually urgent?
- What assumptions are driving this request?
- Where is there flexibility?

### 2 GET PREPARED

Fire drill demands often land on top of existing priorities, and sometimes, additional work cannot be avoided. Preparation means reshuffling other tasks rather than pretending everything can be handled at once.

#### Start with the basics:

- Reprioritize existing work.
- Let something go.
- Delegate or ask for help.

#### Then clarify the request:

- When is this needed?
- How much detail is required?
- Who else should be involved?

### 3 GET PRODUCTIVE

With clarity about urgency in place, do the work at the right scope. Focus on what work is required, not doing what is most exhaustive. Avoid perfectionistic overreach and unnecessary stress. And remember to back up to further clarify the request if you're not exactly sure just how deep to go.

Identifying urgency and challenging whether it's necessary can feel uncomfortable at first, but you'll be amazed at what happens when you stop the fire drills. Handled this way, urgency no longer crowds out important work. It becomes manageable, contained and far less disruptive to the priorities that matters most.

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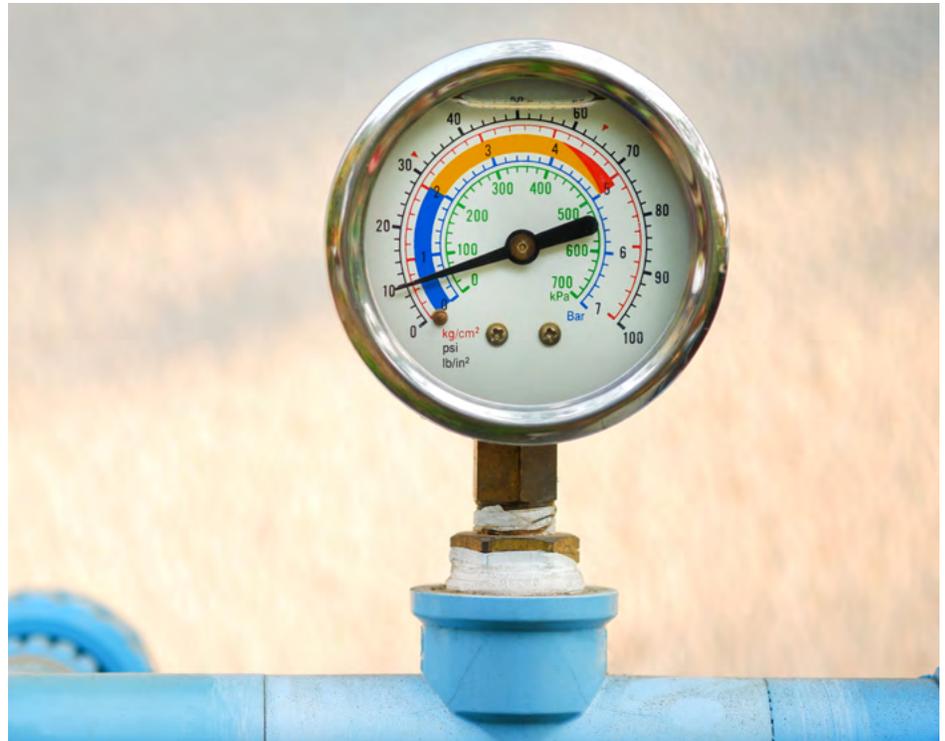
When you work in a member-focused organization like a pool, it's natural to push hard to get work done. More meetings. More ideas. More oversight. More communication. It feels like action, but sometimes, doing more creates drag and minimizes impact.

A more effective approach is to remove what is unnecessary and

create enough margin for the work that really matters. White space, better meetings, smarter communication norms and calmer responses to urgency aren't dramatic changes. They're practical habits that

allow pool teams to work with clarity, rhythm and focus.

**Start small. Make one change. Then reclaim the next slice of time that friction has been quietly taking away.**



## About the Author



Juliet Funt is AGRiP's 2026 Resident and a globally recognized expert on operational efficiency and behavioral waste in organizations. As founder and CEO of the Juliet Funt Group, she helps organizations eliminate friction in daily work to reclaim time and mental space. Her book, *A Minute to Think*, explores how creating white space leads to clearer thinking, better decisions and stronger performance.

[Juliet's residency](#) helps pools understand where time and energy are truly going — and how to reclaim both. Through surveys, workshops, self-paced learning and yearlong resources, she works with pool leaders and staff to identify operational friction, reduce behavioral waste, and build habits that create white space for more focused, member-centered work.