



The Definitive Guide to Slack for Organizing: What is Slack, and Should We Use It?

Slack is a meeting space, water-cooler, bulletin board, and phone-tree for your whole organizing team. It's a great place to coordinate and collaborate, and a fun place to get to know your fellow organizers and activists, even when you can't all be in the same room at the same time. It's a tool that you can use on your computer and your phone to stay in touch with your team, and keep everyone up to date with the important news and goings-on.

No app is going to be totally magic. Slack might work for your team's work style, and it might not. But it's definitely worth checking out.

Slack is like a chatroom for your whole team. It is a computer application that was created as a way for organizations to communicate both as a group and in personal one-on-one discussions. You can communicate as a group through channels or privately via "direct messaging." It is an awesome tool to help you organize! Slack makes communicating easy and fun.

Why is everyone so excited about Slack?

Well, 'cause it's exciting! Online chat-spaces like Slack are a great way for team who aren't always in the same space at the same time to keep that sense of community and camaraderie. Slack is flexible, approachable, and easy to use. It works on all kinds of computers, as well as iPhones and Android phones.

Slack has gained huge popularity in the organizing world in the last few years. It's a great way to stay connected and energized with a big team, even if you can't all be in the same place at the same time. It allows for real-time collaboration and communication, but also lets folks catch up quickly if they've been away. It also works quite well for distributed organizing, and "snowflake" model approaches. (Keep reading our Guides to learn about the best ways to set up Slack for your team!) Coordinating your work in Slack also keeps things out of email and oodles of Google docs, which can be a huge win for productivity as well as security.

Is Slack the right tool for my team?

Slack can replace email, text messaging, and instant messaging for your team, and keep all those communication styles together in one app. With both desktop and mobile versions, Slack can help your team collaborate and coordinate their work no matter where they are — in the field office, at home, or out knocking doors.

But no app is going to be totally magic. Slack might work for your team's work style, and it might not. And as with everything, there is security to consider. But if you take the time to set up your team's Slack workspace, and you purposefully manage it (as you would any other tech tool), it can provide a great sense of community for your team, no matter when or where they're working.

To help you decide whether Slack might work for you, we've broken it down into some Pros and Cons. We've particularly thought of how Slack's features fit in with the workflows of activists and organizers.

Pros

- Stop losing things in email — Slack can replace email, text messaging, and IM with one app
- Keep important information out of your volunteers' personal email accounts
- Share documents and files with some or all of your teammates (written, image, video)
- You can @ mention teammates, which can send them a push notification on their phone or computer — a great way to get their attention. You can also @ mention a group of folks at once, which makes it almost as good as a walkie talkie.
- Start a video or voice conference call with other members of the Slack team on the fly
- Set reminders for yourself or others — You can use Slack's built-in reminders, or Google Calendar and many other to-do lists can be added so that volunteers are reminded of upcoming events or deadlines
- Create a fun community space accessible by your staff and volunteers, whether or not they're in the office!
- Slack is particularly good for: real-time collaboration, quick questions and decisions, getting someone's attention when needed quickly, impromptu video/voice chats, quick poll/voting, keeping everyone feeling connected and in sync over time and space, quickly and effectively on-boarding new team members and volunteers

Cons

- Adoption: "not yet another app to install!" If a lot of your team members aren't tech-enthusiasts, it may be difficult to get them all on board to use Slack. However, it's remarkably intuitive to use, and your team may be surprised by how much everyone likes it!

- Technology hurdles: if members of your team don't have a smartphone, they won't be able to use Slack when away from their computers. So you might want to get a feel for just how much this will impact the team before adopting Slack as a primary communications platform.
- Slack is less ideal for: major decision-making discussions, collaboration on large-scale projects (big documents, for example).

Like a lot of tech tools these days, Slack is an app that has a pay-per-user model but offers a free version with limited features. The good news is that with Slack's fair pricing and a little bit of planning ahead, you can keep your Slack costs manageable, even on a paid plan. And the paid plan is worth it. Keep reading for more details.

Paid vs. free plans

If you're a non-profit, Slack also offers non-profit pricing. It is free for workspaces with 250 or fewer members, and offers an 85% discount for workspaces above that size. You'll have to apply to qualify for this pricing, and currently their site suggests that anything political doesn't qualify. Slack works with TechSoup to review applications.

There's a free tier available, and many teams can make this level work. It limits how many messages it display to 10,000. All but the most recent 10,000 messages will still exist, but you won't be able to see them. The free Slack tier also limits the number of third-party apps that you can integrate with your Slack workspace to 10, which is unlikely to be a problem for most teams and campaigns. The biggest downside to going with the free Slack plan is the fact that you can't implement a retention policy. Retention policies are a very good idea from a security perspective, and make sure that you aren't keeping a lot of potentially sensitive information around in your Slack indefinitely.

Pro Tip: You can add up to 5 free single-channel guests per team member. Great for your volunteers!

The Standard paid plan can get pretty pricey pretty fast, but the pricing is, as Slack says, fair. It starts off at \$6.67/per active user/per month. Slack tracks how many users are active in your workspace each week, and automatically adjusts your bill so that you only pay for the folks that are actually using your Slack. Don't forget: Single-channel guests are not billed as members — they're free! (5 single-channel guests per full paid member) If you need the features of the Standard tier but have a limited budget, you could add your core team as full members and invite your volunteers as single channel guests to a volunteers-only channel. This way, your volunteers can talk to each other in the volunteers channel and even send direct messages, without increasing your monthly bill. For more info on pricing, check out Slack's pricing page.

Overall, Slack can be a great community tool, and can help your staff and volunteers feel more like a team.

<https://medium.com/ragtag-notes/what-is-slack-5075511f6056>