

## Hosting Online Events: Tips & Advice for Organisers

### Preparation: ICT

- **Platform Requirements:** Check if a smartphone or tablet is suitable for the platform you are using, and if there are any browser or operating system limitations for those using computers. You may want to share the help page links for the platform with participants before the event.
- **Joining Instructions:** Make sure your joining instructions are clear and as straightforward as possible. Get them sense-checked by someone else, if you have time, as this can help improve their clarity.
- **Participants Skills:** Avoid making assumptions about your participants' level of ICT skills or knowledge. Unless you know otherwise, it can be helpful to assume everyone is a novice and provide guidance to ensure you do not omit any important information.
- **Participants Technology:** Notify participants about the basic level of technology required ahead of the meeting, e.g. the need for a microphone and/or video camera for discussions. Ensure the participants organise their own technology before the event, and stress facilitators cannot be responsible for checking and set-up during the event – they need to speak to their own IT teams for detailed assistance.
- **Guidance & Help:** Depending on the platform you are using, it can be helpful to share a short video on how to use the platform (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc). You do not have to create one, as there are many examples freely available on YouTube to which you can direct people.
- **Testing:** Set time aside ahead of the event to test tech with anyone presenting remotely, to avoid any complications on the day. If possible, also set time aside a week beforehand for participants to test their set-up, and possibly tour the functions within your chosen platforms as a pre-event activity.

### Preparation: Meeting/Event Format

- **Delegate Numbers:** The larger the group, the harder it is to keep track and maintain their involvement and interest. As the host, you may find it harder to enforce meeting etiquette (e.g. mic muting) with larger numbers. Better to keep things smaller, and more manageable than risk devolving into a chaotic wall of sound!
- **Duration:** Consider how long you want your event to run. An hour to ninety minutes should allow sufficient time for a presenter to talk, and participants to hold discussions on a topic and/or engage in some interactive or collaborative activities.
- **Scheduling & Breaks:** If you are hosting a longer event, ideally schedule breaks and ensure as host you keep people on agenda and to time. Build in time for speaker changeovers, and for people to take comfort breaks if wished during longer meetings. As host, you may wish to fill any breaks with general information or updates on the progression of the event.
- **Content:** As with any event or meeting be prepared to cover less than you think you will. As with any event it is better to deliver less content well, than run over and lose participant engagement. Encourage presenters to prioritise key messages, limit their slide numbers and to keep to time.
- **Attention & Engagement:** Think about how to make the learning active and engaging, whilst keeping everything as relatively straightforward as possible. You might consider using simple interactive activities such as a *Padlet*, *Mentimeter* or other polling and collaborative platforms. Even a shared *Google Drive* document can help enable a participatory activity. For more advanced sessions, you could make use of breakout rooms to facilitate participants work in groups.

- **Copyright & Recording:** All participants, including hosts, must respect copyright and personal data law (see our [Data Privacy Policy](#)). Seek permission from speakers ahead of time to share their materials, and ideally get a written consent from them if you plan on recording their talks. Participants should be notified beforehand if any event segment will be recorded. You should only share screenshots of participants where all participants are aware and have consensually opted in. Seek more advice on sharing event content from the Development Officer.
- **Physical Needs:** Don't forget if you're sitting for over an hour, you may want to have drinks, snacks to hand and arrange a comfort break for yourself ahead of the start time.

### Event Hosting & Facilitation

- **Welcome Slide:** Creating an opening slide, which sets the scene for your event and also shows the plan for the session, can be a useful holding page image – if your platform allows it. Alternatively, you could email it to all participants just before hand to remind them of the imminent start and frame discussions.
- **Audibility:** Periodically check participants can see and hear everything. You may want to have your email open in another window, in case people have any difficulties in hearing and are unable to notify you during the session.
- **Muting:** A good house rule is for participants to keep their microphones muted during presentations, and to use any chat facility for questions they have during the talk. The Host can then use these comments to open up discussions, although microphones should be turned back on for verbal questions too.
- **Turn Taking:** As host, as in a physical event, you will need to ensure everyone's voice is given an opportunity to be heard. Be prepared to politely ask any 'dominant' voices to hold off on further comments, and encourage other participants to speak. Where available, you may need to mute some participants microphones if they fail to comply with your requests for silence.
- **Gallery View:** If using a platform like Teams or Zoom, suggest participants choose Gallery view, so that everyone attending can be seen on screen. However, the availability of this function may be dependent on numbers in attendance or participants technology.
- **Co-Hosting:** If possible, co-deliver with one other person so that one of you can facilitate and the other can monitor Chat. This is especially useful with larger meetings, and for sessions with over 30 participants almost a prerequisite for effective hosting.
- **Keeping to Time:** Be ready to give speakers time warnings so that they stick to their timeslot. Likewise, draw discussions to a close in a timely manner – if people want to keep chatting, they can always host their own event!
- **Recording Sessions:** If you can, record your sessions, to share with those who couldn't attend and as a reminder of what was covered for participants. However, you must seek permission from any speakers and any participants before sharing, ideally before the event starts. However, as recording discussions can stifle some conversations, it may be better to record only the presenters.
- **Video Abstracts:** An alternative to recording a talk could be to ask presenters to share a brief (three minute) video abstract of their talk, with the key points. This can be easily shared, with permission, on a platform like YouTube to provide a taste of the session.
- **Feedback:** Ideally you should still capture some feedback from participants using an online form. Google Forms or Survey Monkey are two very easy to use free platforms you can use. Speak to your group chair for more guidance on questions.

And finally - don't worry if it's not perfect! People will appreciate your efforts, and hopefully come away with some valuable insights, information and knowledge.

This document is provided to give a broad outline of the thinking and preparation needed in organising an online workshop or meeting. It is adapted, with permission, from: NoWAL, 2020. *NoWAL Online Events Top Tips*. If you have any suggestions for additional tips, send them to [mercianlibrariescollaboration@gmail.com](mailto:mercianlibrariescollaboration@gmail.com).