WEBINARS

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT BRIEFS

These briefs are written to support USAID and partners with Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) throughout the Program Cycle. They utilize experience from the KDMD project to share good practices, how-tos, and lessons learned about concepts and activities related to knowledge management and learning.

The **USAID Knowledge-Driven Microenterprise Development (KDMD) project** designs and implements state-of-the-art knowledge management (KM), learning, and collaboration tools and approaches and promotes collaboration among practitioners to speed innovation and adoption. KDMD seeks to maximize the impact of USAID's knowledge and learning investments, and implements strategies and processes to coordinate learning and knowledge sharing across the full range of investments and activities for our USAID programs.

ABOUT WEBINARS

What are webinars?

A webinar is an online seminar delivered over the Internet. It typically follows a pre-determined agenda with presentations and time for questions and answers. A webinar can be synchronous with an in-person event or available online only. Webinars generally include visual presentation materials, such as PowerPoint or Prezi, audio and/or video of the presenters. The webinar platform you choose to use, options described below, will help determine which features to include.

When should you use a webinar?

Webinars can help bring together a group of individuals in different locations to learn more about a specific topic. They can be used to share:

- Highlights from a recent report or book

- Results from an evaluation or study

- Opposing viewpoints on a topic of interest (with multiple presenters)

- Different approaches or experiences around a subject (with multiple presenters)

- New tools or resources

When planning the content for a webinar, it is important to remember that webinars are best used for presentations rather than conversations. While many webinars successfully incorporate interactive features, such as polling, chats, and Q&A, the flow of information is primarily one-way.

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ASSUMPTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Planning

It is sometimes assumed that planning a webinar takes less time than planning an in-person event. This is not the case! Allow ample time to develop the content, coordinate with presenters and facilitators, secure logistics, and test the technology. Planning can often take longer due to the varied locations of presenters, facilitators, and coordinators and to acclimate everyone to the technology. Allow enough time to conduct at least one test run prior to the actual event so that any major issues can be addressed before participants have joined.

Software

In order to conduct a webinar, you need the appropriate software. There are many tools available to host webinars, such as those listed in the "Webinar Platform Examples." Some are free (or at least free for a trial period) while others are available for a fee. Some require separate software or downloads while others are entirely web-based. If you are researching webinar platforms, questions to consider should include:

- How much does it cost?
- What is the maximum number of attendees that can attend an event?
- Does it offer the option to use video?
- Will ads be displayed during the event?
- What types of features does it offer (file sharing, screen sharing, chat functionality, and polls)?

- Is it web-based or does it require software downloads?
- What kind of technical support will be provided?
- Is user registration required?
- Does it offer email capability to send out confirmation and reminder messages to participants?
- Does it offer recording capability?
- Can reports be generated?
- Is it available on mobile devices?
- What are the bandwidth and hardware requirements?

Internet

Since webinars are conducted over the internet, good connectivity is key, especially for the hosts,

> **Webinar Platform Examples**
>
> WebEx
>
> GoToWebinar
>
> Adobe Connect
>
> Vyew
>
> Blackboard Collaborate
> (formerly Elluminate Live! And Wimba Classroom)
>
> anymeeting
>
> MegaMeeting
>
> InstantPresenter

facilitators, and presenters. Different webinar platforms have different connectivity requirements, so be sure to test the platform on your computer system before the event. Webinar hosts should also ensure that they are connected via hardline rather than wireless to limit the possibility of interruptions. It is also a good idea to make your IT department aware of any upcoming webinars so that they can ensure the organization's infrastructure is able to support the event.

Facilitation

Effective facilitation is crucial for a successful webinar. Facilitators can help create an engaging atmosphere for participants and encourage interaction. Facilitators should be familiar with the agenda and content and can help smooth transitions between segments. Read the "Online Facilitation" guidance brief on Learning Lab for more on this topic.

HOW-TOS

Planning

Below are some typical tasks that should be completed during the planning phase of a webinar. Depending on the complexity of the event, allow at least 3 to 4 weeks to plan.

Define the objectives: Think through what you would like to accomplish with your event and what participants should know by the end of the session.

Determine the audience: Are there certain organizations, networks, or individuals who must participate for the webinar to be a success? How

will you make sure that they are represented? What other networks or organizations should be involved?

Think through indicators of success: What specific outcomes do you need to consider the webinar a success? Consider qualitative and quantitative outcomes (number of participants, geographic representation of participants, for example).

Explore possible challenges: It is helpful to anticipate the possible challenges or issues that may affect your webinar. Is the topic controversial? Will your presenters be available for input and testing prior to the webinar? How will you address these challenges?

Decide on post-event products: Some examples of event-related products include a recording of the event, blog post, presentations, or screencast. Who are you trying to reach with these products? Consider your audience, budget, and level of effort required when deciding on post-event products.

Draft an agenda and storyboard: Using the event objectives as a guide, draft an agenda to outline the overall structure, including timing for the different elements of the webinar. Later, the presentations can be incorporated into a more detailed storyboard. The storyboard should include the parts of the webinar with time allocations for each, screenshots of the online space, and roles and responsibilities of key personnel, including the host/facilitator, presenter(s), and technical support.

Select presenters and facilitators: Depending on the subject matter, it may be helpful to have more than one presenter, while still keeping the event manageable. You will want to limit the number of presenters depending on the length of the event.

Set up the online space: Depending on your webinar platform, you may need to prepare the online space before the event. For the invitation, you will need a URL and registration information.

Invite participants: Invite participants to the webinar and give them ample time to get the event on their calendar. Depending on the platform, you may be able to send invitations directly through the webinar software, or you may develop and send them separately (through email or through specialized email marketing software like MailChimp or Constant Contact). Make sure to include essential details in your invitation such as date, time, and link to either the registration page or the online space.

Schedule a dry run: One to two days before the event, schedule a dry run with all key personnel (technical support, host/facilitator, and presenter(s)). Send the storyboard in advance and run through each element. The technical support staff should test the sound of all key personnel and make sure that the facilitator and presenter(s) understand how to use the technology. Make adjustments as needed after the dry run.

Implementation

Below are some typical activities that occur during the webinar event.

Arrive early: The day of the webinar will be busy, so make sure the organizers and technical team begin setting everything up at least an hour in advance. Ideally, the host/facilitator and presenter(s) should arrive at least 45 minutes in advance of the start time to do a sound check, troubleshoot, and double check that the online space, including all presentations and resources, are ready.

Set up the technology: The technical team should provide behind-the-scenes support by:

- Coordinating with the IT department for technical support, as needed.

- Setting up hard line connections and providing a back-up computer in case the main webinar computer crashes. The back-up computer can also provide organizers a way to participate in the webinar as participants (rather than hosts).

- Ensuring that all key personnel have working headsets for the webinar, rather than using their internal computer microphone and speakers.

- Helping the facilitator(s) and presenter(s) test their sound and adjust audio levels as necessary.

Welcome participants: The facilitator should welcome participants either verbally or through a chat pod as they come online, provide technical support, inform participants about when the webinar will start and what they can do (browse resources, review the agenda, chat with one another) while waiting. Consider asking participants their geographic and organizational affiliation to personalize the event. Also, when participants come online, the technical support team or the facilitator should ensure that all participants can hear the sound.

Provide an overview: When the webinar begins, the facilitator should communicate any key logistical information including information about how to communicate with others, whether they will be able to speak, and introduce the agenda and presenters.

Allow time for Q&A: Although questions from participants should be encouraged throughout the webinar, allow a dedicated question and answer time. The host/facilitator should lead the Q&A

by taking questions verbally or through the chat feature and posing them to presenters.

Thank participants: At the end of the webinar, the facilitator should thank participants for joining and provide information on next steps, such as filling out an evaluation, as necessary.

Post-event

After the webinar, the organizers may follow-up with participants by email with the following types of information:

- Event evaluation
- Post-event products and resources, such as a recording of the webinar
- Information about related events
- Opportunities for future discussion and interaction

LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

- ✓ During an in-person event with a webinar component, facilitators and presenters should make sure to provide more information about what is happening in the room so virtual participants feel like they are included.

- ✓ Presenters should be comfortable with their material and speak in a slow and audible voice.

- ✓ Utilize visual elements in webinars since participants will not be able to see the presenters face to face. Consider using presentations (PowerPoint or Prezi), photos, videos, or live note taking.

- ✓ Defining roles and responsibilities is essential for a successful webinar. Typical roles include:

  - **Technical support:** Makes sure that all equipment is working properly, works with presenters to ensure that their audio is working, and troubleshoots throughout the webinar.

  - **Host/Facilitator:** Welcomes participants, communicates all logistical and webinar information, answers questions from participants, synthesizes information, facilitates Q&A, and directs the flow of conversation.

  - **Presenter:** Presents technical information to participants.

- ✓ Conduct a dry run a few days before the webinar event to ensure that all presenters are comfortable with the platform and the agenda. The dry run should mimic the actual event to ensure that everything is working correctly.

- ✓ Consider bringing key personnel (facilitator, presenters) together in a "control room" for the webinar event. Though not necessary, having everyone together can help to create a comfortable atmosphere and facilitate access to technical support.

- ✓ Allow ample time to troubleshoot, both for presenters and participants. For every person who is comfortable with the technology, there is someone who is participating in a webinar for the first time. Be patient and help everyone to work through any issues to ensure a positive experience.

Webinar Examples

[Webinar recording](#) from "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid," a seminar in USAID's Thought Leaders in Learning series, February 13, 2013

[Webinar recording](#) from "Too Big to Know: Scaling Knowledge in a Messy World," a seminar in USAID's Thought Leaders in Learning series, December 11, 2012

[Webinar recording](#) from "Preventing Postharvest Losses from Field to Market: A Food Security Imperative," a seminar in USAID's Agriculture Sector Council series, March 27, 2013

Resources

[Remote meeting guidance from the K4Health project](#)

[Adobe Connect](#)

[Best Practices for Webinar Planning and Execution](#) from the American Marketing Association and Ready Talk

[10 Steps for Planning a Successful Webinar](#) from Tech Soup