

Making Online Events More Inclusive



LEARNING SOLUTIONS GUIDE





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Why Inclusivity?



COVID-19 is changing the way we learn as events, workshops and meetings move online. While participants may appear equal on screen, there are various factors, both individual and structural, preventing people from **accessing, participating in and benefiting equally** from online events.

Inclusive learning is about responding to the diversity of needs of all learners and reducing **obstacles to participation**, to ensure that **no learner is left behind** as we harness the full potential of our learning events.

Ultimately the **impacts** of learning spaces are influenced by how inclusive they are. Trainers and facilitators who fail to consider inclusivity, could risk the **effectiveness** of their events as well as potentially **reinforcing inequalities and harmful stereotypes**.

These tips are for **trainers, facilitators and organisations** that are transitioning their events online. They aim to mainstream inclusivity across all aspects of design and implementation to make online (and offline) events more **inclusive, effective and impactful**.

[Learning Solutions](#)

 **Division for Peace**

1. Know your Audience

- **Understanding your audience** in terms of demographics, needs, abilities and limitations can help you to plan and design more effective online sessions.
- **Needs assessments** now need to include a variety of *technology-related considerations* for online training, such as participants' internet connectivity or digital literacy levels. This allows you to choose a level of technology that allows more people to join your online event.
- Verify how much **experience** participants have with online events and with the technology used and to what extent they feel comfortable to participate online.
- Consider an **intersectional analysis**: factors such as gender, age, geographical location, family status, ability etc. which will constrain and shape your participants' ability to engage and meaningfully contribute.
- Ask if there are **other needs** which the training team should be aware of and try to identify *possible barriers* that inhibit the desired target audience from equal participation.

2. Accessibility

- **Digital accessibility** - Those with fewer resources have less access to some digital technologies such as high functioning smartphones or laptops. Don't assume all participants have easy access to these.
- **Internet stability** - participants may have difficulties to access strong and reliable internet connection. Consider arranging times for the event when internet connectivity may be more reliable or accessible for them or reconsider session plans and timings accordingly.
- Ensure that those who lose internet connectivity during any meeting are able to **catch up**, such as receiving a copy of a presentation. In case you have a small group and participants were lost for just a moment, provide a quick summary of what was missed.
- **Data costs** - Consider that not everyone has access to free or affordable Wifi and some participants may have to pay for mobile data to participate which can become expensive especially for long video calls.
- Use a co-trainer or **technical assistant**, who can update those participants who lost internet connection once they are back online.

3. Technological Literacy Levels

- Participants will have varying levels of **skills and experience** with different types of technology which needs to be considered when designing sessions and choosing which technological tools and platforms you will use in any event.
- Make sure that your choice of technology doesn't **distract or interfere** with the learning experience as much as possible. Ensure the technology is necessary and **enhances the learning experience** rather than inhibiting it.
- Sometimes **low-tech** solutions which require low-bandwidth and are easy to use, may be the most appropriate and effective.
- Make sure that **advanced levels of technology** do not make people feel inadequate or left out because they do not understand how to navigate it. Consider doing a 'tech-check' before the online event where you explain how to use the necessary technology and tools.

4. Environmental Limitations

- **Household constraints** - Consider participants' household constraints and availability when setting agendas and timings, as well as ways in which you could provide flexibility for this. Many participants could have obligations such as childcare which may limit their participation.
- **Unpredictable environments** - Some participants are surrounded by unpredictable factors such as family, children or construction work, which are often out of their control. Be patient and understanding if such elements slightly disrupt your session.
- **Noise** - Some participants may be joining from spaces where they cannot talk freely, for example having to share a space with others or with noise in the background. Be flexible if they are not able to participate or share so actively as a result.
- Consider **time zones** of participants and that access to your event is not more challenging for some participants due to the time which you choose. You could plan your event to take place over multiple days to distribute the load or repeat sessions at different times.

5. Unconscious Bias

- We all have **unconscious biases** of some sort. Consider that your own biases may affect how you design and facilitate online spaces as well as the way you interact with different participants. You can learn more about your biases [here](#).
- Once you have explored and identified them, think of strategies for how you can **mitigate and neutralise** these biases and their potential impacts for learners and the learning environment.

6. Participation

- Consider using **Chatham House rules** (participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, or participants, may be revealed without permission).
- **Set meeting norms** - a co-created set of guidelines between trainers and participants that outline how individuals should engage in the meeting space. They are most effective if they are agreed-upon by everyone with accountability mechanisms in place to ensure attendees adhere to group's agreements.
- **Give different options to participate:** writing in chat, voting in a poll, sending contributions ahead of time, allow people to come prepared if this helps their confidence by sending them guiding questions or instructions in advance.
- Consider any **power dynamics** there may be amongst the participants which may impact participation. For example, some participants may be less comfortable sharing when their supervisors are also present.
- **Shyness** - Don't assume that only clear and confident communicators have valuable ideas. Extroverted personalities tend to find it easier to contribute than more introverted ones.
- **Give enough space** for participants to contribute. Silence does not necessarily mean there is a lack of participation as some need more time than others to feel comfortable to share.

- At the same time, be careful not to put too much pressure on quieter participants by suddenly forcing them to speak. Create spaces which allow contribution and ask for voices who have not yet spoken.
- Consider **following up** after the meeting to give a chance for inputs for those who may have felt less comfortable to share.
- Use **breakout groups** which may allow for more active participation from some participants. When creating smaller groups, consider the composition of personalities, demographics and diversity of those groups.
- **Physical participation** - Consider that some participants may have physical constraints which affect their participation, especially if asking them to do something physically with their body, such as making a body movement.
- Ask for **consent** especially for exercises which may be outside of some participants' comfort zones. Allow the use of a webcam to be optional unless it is completely necessary.
- Consider whether **video recording** your sessions is appropriate or not. If you do record, be sure to let participants know, and be aware that this may make some participants feel less comfortable to share or give inputs. Consider other options of recording like a note-taker.

7. Communication

- Consider using these '[Facilitation Cards](#)' or other similar tools to allow for more inclusive communication where participants can communicate with each other without having to speak.
- Make sure participants are aware of **chat functions** which allow another means of communication and participation.
- Ensure that participants know they can **write to facilitators directly**, not only in the communal chat space where everyone can see.
- Use anonymous **voting and polling systems** and activities to get feedback and input from the group as an alternative to asking people to share individually.
- Consider using **shared virtual whiteboards**. This can help groups brainstorm and offer their inputs without necessarily having to speak.

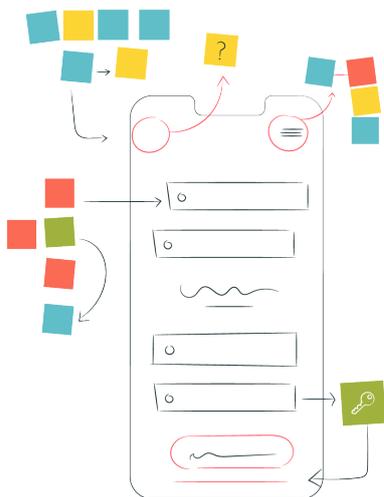
8. Language

- Consider **non-native speakers** and participants who have different levels of language proficiency. Think about how they can be supported, for example by providing written material.
- Have **written support in different languages** spoken by participants (slides, worksheets) and consider using subtitles.
- Consider using **simultaneous interpretation** to allow participants to express themselves in a language in which they are comfortable.
- **Speak clearly** and at a pace that everyone is able to understand. You may need to often repeat what is said and use vocabulary which is accessible and not too technical.
- Provide participants with a **simple feedback tool/mechanism** (e.g. hand signal or digital symbol) to indicate if something is unclear or you need to slow down.

- Avoid commenting on participants' personal characteristics such as choice of clothes or appearance.
- Be **culturally sensitive** and avoid using language that reinforces stereotypes. Some may use humour to try to make people comfortable but it can often result in the contrary.
- Instead of asking participants questions such as "Where do you come from?" ask questions such as "Where are you calling from today?". This allows participants the option to reveal as much as they want about their identity.
- If you are unsure, you can ask participants how they would like to be addressed, or you can find this information before-hand during a needs assessment.
- Make sure you are up to date on the **appropriate language** to use to talk about various social and ethnic groups.
- Use **language that invites** people to join in the activities, and offer opportunities to adapt the activity to their own comfort levels.

9. Methodological Design

- Design a **variety of methods** such as with different group sizes to allow people to feel more comfortable to share. Some people shine and open up in small group discussions, others in individual work and others in large group activities.
- Make sure you address **various learning styles** by designing a holistic and dynamic learning package that involves audio, visual and kinaesthetic learning.
- Consider also **how to support** those who have any form of impairment which would affect their ability to take part. For example provide a script for those with hearing difficulties or concise alternative-text descriptions of content presented within images.



- Consider providing **supportive learning material** such as workbooks or learning journals. This could come in digital or physical forms where they can print their learning materials to assist participants in the digital experience with something physical and tangible.
- Anticipate that online processes can often **take longer** than expected. Conversation flow tends to be slower in online events and getting everyone involved can take more time.
- Ensure that **sessions are not too long** where only those with excellent and resilient attention spans are able to follow.
- See our '[Methodological Tips](#)' for more advice.

10. Content

- Include **different types of examples** and case studies in order to give different perspectives on concepts or themes.
- If appropriate, **review your references and sources** to see if they represent a wide range of social identity groups and perspectives across privileged and marginalized statuses.

- Review your use of **language and terminology** and ask for feedback on your content from others from different backgrounds to your own.
- Think about **cognitive overload**. Give enough time to process the information you present.
- Circulate a **meeting summary** after an online event with key outcomes and action points.

11. Dealing with Difficult Situations

Before the online event takes place, **prepare yourself** to deal with potentially challenging, uncomfortable or sensitive situations:

- **List some scenarios** of difficult situations that may arise (rude or insensitive comments, gender or ethnic stereotypes, aggressive or resistant participants etc).
- Decide in advance what your **red line** is: until which point do you allow participants to share their own opinions, and where do you intervene.
- Prepare some **strategies of interventions** to foster learning without alienating any individual participant. Silence or “everything goes” attitudes risk the safety and inclusiveness you are trying to create in the online space.
- Consider how you may want to **reach out** to participants after the event individually if involved in such an incident. The responsibility of the host does not disappear once the event itself is over.

Use **co-facilitators** who are looking out for these inclusivity dynamics through different lenses during the event so that issues can be addressed as they arise.

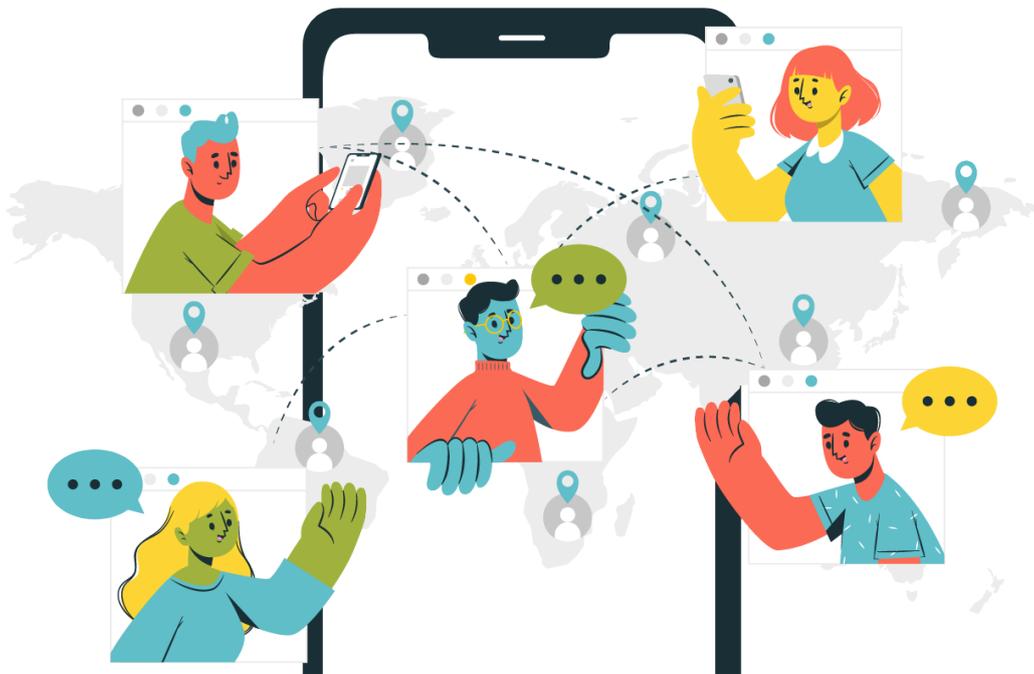
12. Visual Imagery

- Visual imagery can be discriminatory if the people within the images are represented only in stereotypical ways. Ensure that images you use in your communication material, before, during or after an event **do not reinforce stereotypes and unconstructive narratives**.
- We communicate ideas about the world not only through our language, but also through the images which we choose to use. Images have the power to **transform** how we see the world and can allow us to **consider perspectives** we wouldn't necessarily think of. Select images which support constructive narratives of the people and issues you are representing.
- Review from a **variety of perspectives** to see if your materials are sensitive to different cultures and identities.
- Consider your choice of **fonts, colours and text sizes** so that they are easily legible.
- Be **visually concise**. Remove unnecessary items which might overload the cognitive process.

13. Feedback

- Assess inclusivity in the **feedback and evaluation** of your events through surveys, polls and follow-up chats.

- If evaluating, take an **intersectional approach** and collect disaggregated data to evaluate whether you achieved your learning objectives.
- If you realise that not everyone was able to participate, engage and benefit equally, consider how you will address this through **appropriate follow-up actions**.
- Use the feedback to see how you can **improve your events** in the future.
- Use the above tips after your event as a **checklist** to evaluate inclusivity from different perspectives.
- **Share with others** about how they can make their own events more inclusive.





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