5 Tips on Learning Design for Webinars

COMMUNICATIONS TEMPLATE SERIES

Disaster Risk Financing & Insurance Program

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01. Ensure your webinar is demand-driven.

It is always useful to conduct a short survey with the webinar's target participants. The survey should act as a needs analysis exercise that assesses the audience's prior experience with the topic and identifies learning needs.

- If you wish to delve deeper into the pre-design, consider conducting a **Learning Needs and Resources Assessment (LNRA)** to determine what the participants already know and what they need to learn.
- You do not always have to conduct a full LNRA. A best practice is to review the registration list beforehand to get a sense of participation. Review the organizations' websites and look at profiles of a subset of participants; this step helps you understand their scope of work and choose examples and stories that address their sector or where they work.
- As part of the LNRA, you can ask a few questions on the registration form, conduct 10-minute phone calls with three to five potential participants, and visit the websites of the participants' organizations. Look for recurring themes—ideas and challenges that come up frequently—and build virtual activities around these areas to engage your participants.
- For webinars with a limited audience or offering planned learning programs, the LNRA should ideally be much more specific and detailed.

QT! QUICK TIP!

When you send out the webinar log-in details, include a short pre-webinar reading or video so participants can get a head start if they wish. Alternately or additionally, send a couple of open-ended questions for participants to consider, and then revisit these questions during the webinar.

02. Invest in engaging content.

A webinar is not merely a series of PowerPoint slide decks presented by speakers virtually.

Webinars pose specific challenges not present in face-to-face learning situations. Participants in webinars may be less motivated, since their inducement to attend is lower. They are likely not conditioned to learning through virtual platforms, so their expectations for learning are also low. Moreover, the anonymity of the experience allows them to multitask during the webinar and not devote their full attention to what you are saying.

To meet these challenges, it is imperative that you invest in designing your content to make it interesting for your audience. Remember, a recorded webinar has a longer shelf life than a face-to-face presentation.

Here are a few tips to ensure that your content is engaging:

- **Define the webinar's people, purpose, and time.** Identify a terminal learning objective and design multiple enabling objectives to communicate the learning.

- **Cover a reasonable number of objectives.** Every webinar should have three to four key takeaways. Spend 10–15 minutes explaining the background and detail for each.

- **Grade and structure the content.** Divide the content into three parts: (1) must-know, (2) need-to-know, and (3) good-to-know. This will help prioritize and narrow down content to be included. Next, think of content structure. Some possible structures include (1) chronological, (2) process-oriented (i.e., step by step), (3) easy to difficult, or (4) known to unknown.

• Keep your presentations short. Based on decisions made while grading content, chunk the presentation. To accommodate shorter attention spans associated with online learning, don't go for more than a few (10–15) minutes without asking the participants a question or running a poll. Dividing a longer presentation into smaller segments with breaks in between will energize participants, help them refocus, and allow more voices to be heard. It also lets presenters check for understanding, and (since presenting to silence can be de-energizing) allows them to pause and recharge.

• Create soft monitoring and evaluation targets. Think about what the participants will do during the webinar beyond just "listening" and "watching." How can the audience be more active to deepen their own learning? For example, can they apply the principles and knowledge to their own experience through analysis, naming, reflection, etc.? You can even create easy-to-measure targets like net referral scores and star ratings for the meeting.

• Foster audience interaction. Interactive tasks create deeper engagements. Provide instructions to help participants engage with the content to meet their learning objective, as applicable to their individual situations.

For example:

• Precede your presentation with an open question to the participants. A slide could read, "As you listen to this short presentation on [webinar topic], consider how you have witnessed these principles in action." Be sure to call on one or two participants to express their views. This participation can be kept short—30 to 45 seconds.

• Include at least one audience poll or a multiple choice quiz after each presentation or topic. If the presentation or topic is longer than 30 minutes, break for some audience interaction every 30 minutes.

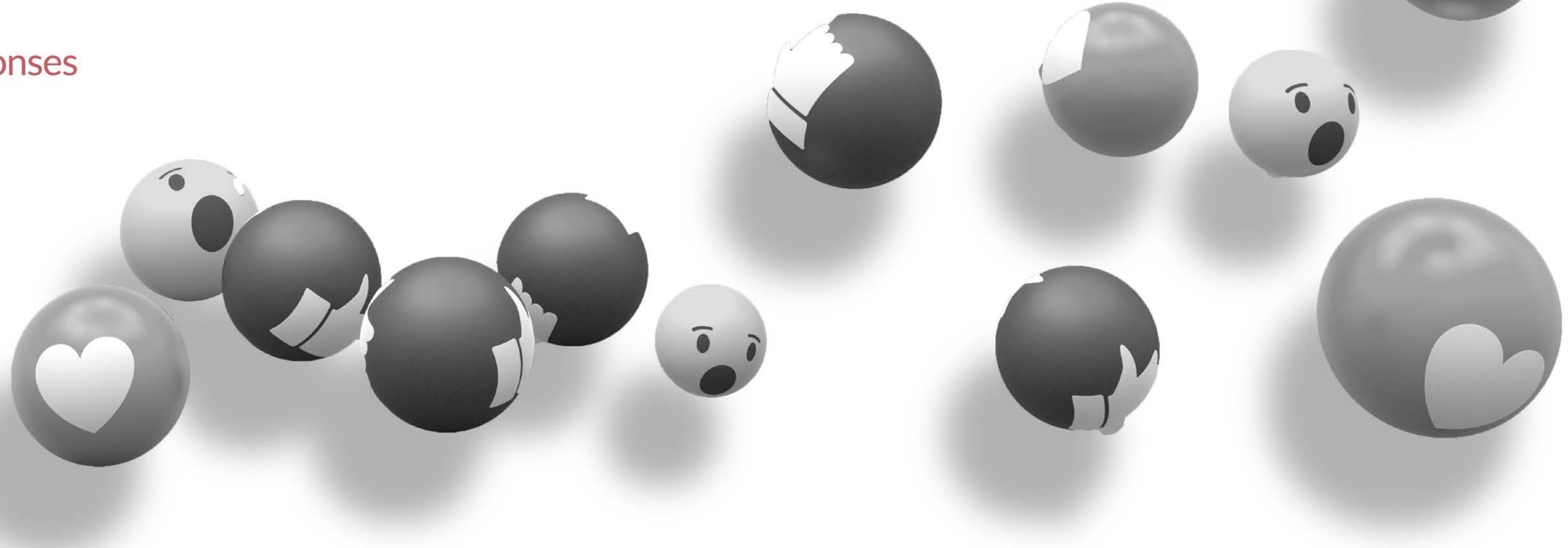
• Ask participants to raise their hands in response to a question using the Raise Hand tool on the webinar platform. Remember this works best in smaller or breakout groups.

• Ask open questions to the group and hear samples of their responses (e.g., "How have you seen this [DRF problem] affect your country?"). The chat/messaging functionality of the webinar tool can also be used for this purpose.

• Incorporate an interactive map where the participants can indicate their location.

• Include questions that have one- or two-word responses and then present the responses in word clouds.

• Ask the audience to find an object that symbolizes their involvement with the topic and share that with the group. This can be done via text in the chat box or via a photo or video on a phone group.



03. Share the airspace:

Empower your participants to engage in learning activities.

• Design opportunities for large group discussions, small group work (if possible), and individual reflection (great for introverts!).

• Break the webinar into 10- to 15-minute sections or mini-presentations. Frame each mini-presentation with an open question that invites the learners to listen and watch more attentively.

• Use the platform's whiteboard and invite the audience to add their answers on web post-its.

• Allocate adequate time for questions throughout the webinar, as opposed to cramming in a few token questions at the end. A best practice is to leave 30 percent of the total webinar time for questions, interspersed throughout the duration of the event. Should the Q&A session end early, then close your webinar ahead of schedule.

• If the webinar includes more than 10 participants, using an audio line is too complicated. In these cases always use a chat box or Q&A box to solicit responses.

• It is always fun to invite participants to do a kinesthetic or active-movement task. For example, you can stretch together at the halfway point to get the blood flowing again—or maybe engage in a short breathing exercise.

• Include blank framework or process templates and share them with the participants. Provide opportunities for the participants to fill in the templates as the session progresses. A few participants can be invited to share progress throughout the session.

04. Prepare visual content.

Webinar participants may not always be able to see the presenter or have an opportunity to interact. Hence the visuals for your content are critical.

• Invest time and resources to create high-quality presentation materials. Choose strong images, keep the text clear and minimal, and make sure that the formatting (titles, headers, spacing, etc.) is consistent.

• Limit each slide to just one idea or one broad point.

• Use 30 point (or larger) font for optimal legibility. This is critical for participants joining on handheld devices like smartphones and tablets.

• Where possible, replace text with infographics, images, graphs, and charts.

• Use on-screen slides with basic visuals and little or no animation so people with slower bandwidth connections won't experience a delay in the transitions. If possible, log in as a participant on another device to see what participants are experiencing.

• When possible use online mind-mapping tools and other data visualization platforms to avoid death by PowerPoint. Mind mapping helps retention and engagement, simplifies complex issues, and sparks creative cognition.

• Presenters should ensure that they stay in the frame, keep still, and are in focus. During the test run, test the depth of field or range of focus for your webcam, as well as how far you can move from side to side before you're out of the frame.

• Change slides frequently (set a time limit per slide) to keep the visuals moving and fresh. A new slide helps to bring back the attention of the participants and allows them to refocus.

QT! QUICK TIP!

At the start, provide a simple outline of the webinar that explains what will be covered. Refer to this outline repeatedly during the session so that participants are aware of their progress. Consider using a graphic (e.g., a "you are here" arrow, a milestone, or roadmap) that marks where you are in the webinar, and periodically show a slide that indicates your progress throughout the material. This is also an excellent way to break up the webinar into different sections.

05. Finish well.

To accommodate the unexpected, always plan your webinar to use only 80 percent of the time allocated. No matter how late you start, **always finish on time** so that people can leave as planned.

If you have time at the end of the webinar, invite the learners to name what they will apply to their work situation going forward. If you still have a few minutes after the end of the Q&A session, mention and briefly discuss some questions that you anticipated but participants did not ask.

The facilitator should close the webinar by thanking participants for their time and attention and by announcing the post-webinar follow-up schedule. It is a good idea to mention where the webinar recording will be available and by when.

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