USAID/BHA – RAPID Fund Capacity Building Programme
For local NGOs and the DMAs

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE
VIRTUAL TRAINING DELIVERY

Contents

1 Background

The COVID-19 has induced a new normal of remote and virtual working and, hence, necessitated adaptability to the technology and digital tools for remote management. To avoid the risk of infection and to achieve its objective of "Capacity Building of local NGOs and the DMAs[1] in Sindh province" the RF management revised its plan from on-site to online training. The session will now be conducted online/ remotely using digital tools. On the one hand, the online approach has advantages like increased productivity; reduced overhead cost, access to more humanitarian organizations and DMAs in the province, it has also some challenges especially capturing the attention of participants and their productive involvement in the training activities. To overcome such challenges during virtual training in Sindh province and ensure its smooth, timely, effective and efficient implementation, the following measures are suggested. Both the facilitator and the participants are expected to adhere to the instructions and achieve RFIII objectives as per plan.

It is worth mentioning that under its second objective, capacity building of local NGOs and the PDMA in Sindh province, RAPID III will select 40 NGOs from Sindh and coordinate with the PDMA Sindh to participate in the capacity-building initiatives. RAPID will conduct capacity gaps/needs assessment of the selected NGOs and the PDMA, and based on the assessed needs, develop customized capacity building plans, and sign MOUs with the selected entities.

2 What is Virtual Training?

Virtual training is a digital teaching and learning process in which participants can interact with learning resources and with one another through the internet as if they can in a traditional classroom.

In a virtual setting, face-to-face activities such as presentations and discussions that are traditionally done in a physical classroom are simulated with web conferencing technology. Communications take place in real-time just like in a physical classroom.

3 How does Virtual Training work?

Virtual training is not a novel concept but is often built on (or share many similar features with) web conferencing technologies that are used to run virtual meetings.

Like web conferencing software, in a virtual classroom:

   a. There can be one or more hosts, presenters, moderators, and participants
   b. One can participate by video, audio or both
   c. One can use text chats to communicate with other participants
   d. The presenter can show their presentation or share their screen

However, to turn web conferencing into more effective virtual training, additional technologies like the following are often used:

   1. **Break-out rooms** for group discussions/activities
   2. A **live whiteboard** for real-time collaboration
   3. Indication of **participant status** (which changes when participants raise their hands temporarily leave the room, etc.)
   4. **Participation control** (e.g. listen-only, one person speaking at a time)
   5. **Feedback tools**, such as polls and surveys
   6. **Recording:** Analyze your performance or encourage the trainees to revise the learning contents by watching the past sessions interactive playback.

---

[1] DMAs: Disaster Management Authorities including PDMA (Provincial Disaster Management Authority) at provincial level and DDMAs (District Disaster Mangement Authorities) at district level in Sindh Province.

7. **Media player:** make learning more engaging by using different multimedia materials or sharing YouTube videos during live sessions.
8. **Session templates:** trainer can create, reuse and share with other trainers contents templates, which save all learning resources arranged by the trainer in the virtual classroom.
9. **LTI integration:** LTI is an abbreviation for Learning Tools Interoperability, which is a standard protocol developed by the IMS Global Learning Consortium

4 How to implement Virtual Training Class?

Setting up a virtual training class is often quite straightforward with the help of supportive technology. However, it also takes some skills and can involve more planning than traditional instructor-led training. There are many virtual training applications such as VEDAMO, Moodle, Canvas, MS Teams, Zoom and Schoology Learning management system etc. However, a web application would be selected which is convenient for all participants and the trainer.

For this further assistance will be required for a suitable web-based application selection from IT Expert of Concern RF.

5 Best Practices for delivering effective Virtual Training

The important thing to realize about virtual training is that it is different from face-to-face training—not better, not worse, just different.

Cindy Huggett, a virtual training consultant, identifies three key differences between virtual and face-to-face training. Pamela Hogle elaborates on these three key differences and explains why it is worth investing time preparing in these three areas for effective virtual training:

5.1 Technology is the main platform in the Virtual Training Class

This does not mean that technology is driving the training, but it will be painful (and the training may fall apart) when technology fails. Often the trainer is comfortable with web conferencing technology, but the learners may not be, therefore, start with a simple setup, do a test run (preferably a day before actual training) and be prepared to deal with unforeseen situations. Be flexible with the use of programming and always have a backup plan in case something does not work.

5.2 Different strategies are needed to engage Virtual Learners

Remember, as a facilitator one cannot see all the learners at once (and sometimes not at all). There is a need to keep the learners engaged and regularly check-in to make sure they are still in touch with the class and the topics.

5.3 Virtual Training delivery is a multi-tasks activity

An online facilitator needs to simultaneously present, engage learners and use the technology platform. This need to acknowledge that one cannot do everything individually and it requires help from other team members for managing the classroom. Therefore, it is common for an online facilitator to team up with a silent partner, usually, an IT expert/ co-facilitator (often called the moderator) whose main role is to help manage participations in a virtual training class.

6 Instructional Strategies for Effective Virtual Training Delivery

To deliver effective virtual training, employing the following instructional strategies can go a long way:

6.1 Use audiovisuals strategically to attract and prolong learners' attention

Virtual training must include some presentations, most likely done with PowerPoint or something like it. Unlike in a classroom where you can walk around and switch to a whiteboard or demonstration very easily, you might have to bake a lot of content into your slideshow in virtual training contents. It is, therefore, useful to keep information in your slideshow in smaller chunks so that the audience can follow along with

slide changes and animations. It is also useful to present with tables, charts, diagrams to visualize ideas rather than bullet points.

6.2   Design interactive activities to engage learners

This is not a new concept and many facilitators already master it in the classroom, but there is a need to find ways to do it effectively online as well. There is not a magic bullet on how to do this effectively and the activities will significantly vary depending on the subject of the training. The good point is that many activities that are used in the classroom still work online with some adaptation. This needs creative thinking about what the learners will see and hear and how the participants' maximum interaction is possible individually or in groups.

6.3   Provide guided practice and feedback to participants

This might be sometime difficult to provide different feedback to participants; however, a blended approach can be adopted. One of the rational approaches can be to provide quality feedback to individuals outside of class and provide general feedback in class to which most participants can relate.

6.4   Tools for Involving Participants

The key of virtual training success is active participants' involvement in the training sessions. Therefore, some of the following tools may be used for the effective involvement of the participants during training:

    a.   Show of hands
    b.   Text chat
    c.   Online break out rooms
    d.   Shared whiteboard
    e.   Polls
    f.   Quizzes
    g.   Photo share
    h.   Stretch breaks.

7   Features of Virtual Learning

Following are certain features of virtual learning, which makes the learning process more interactive and effective:

7.1   Classroom Engagement

There is an arrangement of active discussions, immediate feedback, and personal familiarity with instructor and classmates through real-time interaction in the e-learning process followed during virtual training

7.2   Dynamic Learning

This experience comes with more than just engagement though. Virtual learning can be one of the most effective ways to learn as it allows for a more dynamic exploration of topics, ideas and concepts than is possible in a medium with a time lag.

Videoconferencing, for instance, makes it possible to ask questions and receive answers mid-lesson; to discourse and debate with other trainees at a brisk and exciting pace; to collectively drive a conversation into unexpected new directions.

7.3   Instructional Depth

With virtual learning, regular and frequent interactions with the trainer are made, which is not just a good way to confirm your trainer's credibility but also provides a regular opportunity for face-to-face discussion, individual guidance, and perhaps even the chance to establish a mentorship. This provides the best work opportunity to the learner with the help of accessible and supportive instructions.

8   Challenges of Virtual Learning that MUST be planned before Training Delivery

Although virtual learning is very useful in multiple ways, however, it also bears some limitations and challenges that sometimes restrict the smooth learning process. Therefore, the following points must be considered and suitably planned before the actual delivery of virtual classes.

8.1   Rigid Schedule

The defining characteristic of a virtual learning experience is its adherence to a set schedule. Lectures and class discussions take place at established meeting times that must be delivered at the agreed time. Here, the challenge is that if the medium of technology does not work at that particular time, then the class cannot be repeated.

8.2   Technical Difficulties

Another big challenge of virtual learning is the technical difficulties like spotty internet, crashing hard drives, and dying batteries that sometimes become anything from an inconvenience to a disaster. Therefore, adequate planning shall be made to cope up with technical difficulties before the actual delivery of virtual training.

9   Measures for Virtual Training Implementation

9.1   For Facilitator

Following measures are suggested for the facilitator to ensure successful online and remote training.

> **Thumb Rules for a successful online training**
> 1. Self-motivation/self-starter
> 2. Good organization and time-management skills
> 3. Familiar with computers and the Internet
> 4. Resourceful and actively seek answers and solutions to questions and problems

1. Before the training, practice and understand different functions (scheduling training, screen sharing, participation control, participants status, feedback tools, reactions, video, recording, live whiteboard etc.) of virtual training application i.e. ZOOM/ MS Team

2. Contact each participant, confirm their participation in the training and crosscheck their particulars especially names and emails.

3. Share details of the training, guidelines for joining virtual training and link for joining training with participants.

4. Request participants to share expectations from the training and tailor training materials in light of participants' expectations.

5. Set up a test call before the training date. It will help participants to understand the virtual training application and sort out the problems if any.

6. Ensure proper arrangements for the delivery of remote training including separate seating arrangements in your home, which should be free of disruption by other family members and children.

7. Ensure proper internet connectivity and alternate arrangements for power like generator, UPS, etc. that could be used in case of electricity breakdown.

8. Rehearse your contents before the training and use good quality headphones for audio clarity. Use video options for the training that could help to get participants' attraction. Also, encourage the participants to use video options during the training. It could be used as a monitoring tool for participants' attendance.

9. Follow the session plan and all steps of conducting the training as outlined in the plan.

10. Make the content as interactive, dynamic, and fun as possible to prevent students from getting bored.

11. Divide course contents and sessions into several parts with brief lessons that can be completed in a short amount of time. It will help in keeping the participants engaged in the training.

12. Allocate a time slot to each exercise, group work, discussion, or presentation to ensure timely completion of the activity. Also, send reminders to the participants involving in the group activities telling them that they are running out of time and encouraging them to complete the course.

13. Encourage open communication among the participants; involve them in barnstorming, quizzes etc. Participants may sometimes get frustrated due to the lack of human contact, the absence of a facilitator, and an inability to discuss it with their colleagues. To overcome this problem,

14. Share handouts, reading material, references, and links to online resources (relevant to the sessions) well before the start of the training. Advise and encourage the participants to read and comprehend the material. Inform the participants about quizzes, group work, competitions that would be based on the reading material.

15. Technical problems become major obstacles to online training. There might be compatibility issues (with operating systems, browsers, and smartphones), the courses could be frequently interrupted or the participants could lose their interest. Therefore, other options like group chat, emails, or WhatsApp group or other online platforms etc. might be useful alternatives.

9.2   For Participants

For a successful online and remote training, the participants tend to possess the following characteristics;

1. Before the training, practice and understand different functions (screen sharing, use of hand raise and other reactions, video, recording, live whiteboard etc.) of virtual training application i.e. ZOOM/ MS Team

2. Keep necessary stationery with them like drafting pad, ballpoint, pencil, etc. to take necessary notes and documents essential points and discussion during the training.

3. Ensure continuous power supply, internet connection, and conducive environment to ensure smooth and uninterrupted participation in the training.

4. Preferably, login from a computer in a separate location at homes (if the participants are attending the training from homes). Smartphones, although provide luxury to attend the training, it is not as user-friendly as a laptop or desktop.

5. If the participants are attending the training from the field offices or a shred location, follow the SoPs like adequate social distancing, etc. Follow the instructions of the facilitator to complete the training timely and smoothly.

6. Carefully read out all the reading material including handouts and other resources as advised by the facilitator(s) before the training.

7. Actively participate in all sessions of the training and contribute to the group work and panel discussion during the training.

8. Complete homework and assignments if assigned by the facilitator

9. Ask questions from facilitator other colleagues and respond to the queries/ questions of others

10. Respect the norms as set out collectively at the beginning of the training, respect each other views, and encourage open but respectful discussion.

11. Observe the timing of the training and all activities, sessions, and group work.