

Best Practices for Designing and Delivering Webinars

Health Resources and Services Administration
Office of Regional Operations – Region III

This document outlines strategies for designing and delivering webinars that best encourage participation and support participant transfer of learning to their workplace. Suggested strategies are based on academic research and lessons learned from the field.

- Plan for post-webinar learners
- Support transfer of learning.
- Allow appropriate time for questions.
- Use a closing exercise.
- Apply standard slide presentation principles.
- Use an opening exercise.
- Show participants how to use the necessary webinar tools.
- Use multiple presenters/faculty.
- Plan for frequent interaction.
- Limit lecture durations.
- Keep them short.
- Use a Producer.
- Select the best delivery method.

Select the best delivery method.

Increased access to webinar technology has made webinars an easy, standard way of providing education and training today. However, availability of technology in itself does not automatically result in being the best means to facilitate what you are trying to accomplish. Know *why* you are pursuing webinar as your training modality. **What will be the value added?** If you're planning to simply show slides and take questions, then how will the education effort or experience be more beneficial than a teleconference, for instance – for you, or for the learner? Consider what webinar tools you're planning to use and how they will enhance learning outcomes.

Also consider the way in which your intended learners will participate in your webinar. Many times in clinic settings, for example, few staff have access to a computer, so staffs often convene in groups to participate, which can then eliminate their individual opportunities to engage in the interactive features of a webinar. If you're not planning on using webinar tools, or if those tools will not enhance learning outcomes, or if participants will not be able to engage those tools, then you should consider alternative and/or complimentary delivery methodologies such as a teleconference, an asynchronous narrated slide presentation, or (printed or electronic) documents.

Use a Producer.

If possible, use a “Producer.” A Producer is **a person who runs the webinar platform/interface**, so that the focus of the presenter(s) can be on the training content, rather than, for example, what to do if a participant’s computer crashes. A Producer does not need to be a highly trained person – simply someone who can learn the webinar platform. Consider using Interns, for instance, who can be free – and producing webinars can give them a skill set they didn’t have before.

Amongst the producer’s duties, ask him/her to do a “dry-run” of the webinar ahead of time, so that all people involved in delivering the webinar understand their roles and platform functions. Also this allows you to test the technology and make sure it works the way you think it does.

Keep them short.

Webinars should **not be more than one hour**, for the same reason that schools often limit class durations to 50 minutes, or that counselors tend to limit counseling sessions to 50-60 minutes: Adults are challenged with attending to learning content for more than an hour. If you need to cover a lot of material that will take more than an hour, consider multiple webinars – even if they are in the same day, just with significant break-times in between.

Don’t assume that a webinar needs to be an entire hour. There is nothing wrong with short, 10-15-minute webinars that provide learning opportunities. In fact, learners are more likely to retain greater portions of the webinar material when they are smaller in duration.

Limit lecture durations.

Keep lectures to **no more than ten minutes**. It’s not easy to look at or listen to the same person for longer than that, despite how animated we might like to think we are as trainers. Also, limiting lecture times to ten minutes provides viewers of archived webinars with logical points to break so that viewing can be integrated throughout a work day. You can offer a series of lectures within one webinar, but break them up with other types of learning activities.

Plan for frequent interaction.

The settings in which learners tend to participate in work-related webinars, as well as the tools (i.e., computers, electronic pads) used to participate in webinars, allow for a great deal of distraction – perhaps more than any other current learning methodology. Think about the last time you participated in a webinar. Were you inclined to do something else, such as write and send a few e-mails, work on a file sitting on your computer, talk with a visitor, and/or take a phone call, etc.? If so, did you learn anything meaningful from the webinar? In order to help participants attend fully to a webinar, they need to be engaged with the event. Best practices suggest facilitating interaction with webinar attendees **every four minutes**. This means that the all-too-frequent “talking head to slides” approach to a webinar is not the most effective strategy for promoting learning.

Interaction strategies are wide in range. Webinar platforms provide many tools (i.e., polls, chats, games) for interacting with learners. Familiarize yourself with those tools and think about how you can effectively use them. You do not need, though, to be limited by or reliant on platform tools alone. For example, you could ask participants to stand up, look out the window, and type

what they see. You could show them a picture and ask them to type the first thing that comes to mind. You could simply ask a yes/no question and ask them to respond. You are only limited by your own imagination!

Use multiple presenters/faculty.

This is not a “must,” but using multiple presenters can enhance participants’ ability to attend because hearing various voices and/or seeing shifting faces serves as a “pattern interrupt,” which prompts attendees to reactivate their senses. There is an assortment of presentation formats that allow use of multiple faculty, including: a) panels, where multiple presenters take turns presenting; b) radio show-like formats, where the subject matter expert is interviewed; and c) rotating pairs, where two speakers rotate their presentations among each other.

Show participants how to use the necessary webinar tools.

Learners will not be able to engage in the webinar if they do not have the skills to operate within the webinar system. Show attendees how to use a webinar tool before you count on it being used. This is one way to inject interaction throughout the webinar.

Use an opening exercise.

Facilitating an opening exercise helps break attendees’ pre-occupation with whatever else they were doing or thinking moments before the webinar, assisting them with their transition into learning mode. Make certain that the exercise is somehow relevant to the material and consider what else you might want to achieve through the opening exercise. It can help facilitate networking amongst participants, for example, if the exercise provides a chance for them to connect with each other in some way, shape or form such as asking participants to “point” on a shared map to where they work, or to “raise their hands” when their area of residence is called. In addition to the aforementioned opening activities, there are many options, such as showing a picture and asking for chat responses; taking a poll; asking a simple question; or showing one or two of the key tools that attendees will be asked to use during the webinar.

Apply standard slide presentation principles.

Most webinars employ the use of slideshow programs, such as PowerPoint. If you are showing slides in your webinar, realize that standard slide presentation principles about color, format and use still apply. Whether the slide presentation is being projected or viewed on a computer screen, standard slide principles still apply.

Use a closing exercise.

Facilitating a closing exercise can help attendees tie things together and identify how they intend to use what they have learned. Closing exercises can help participants celebrate what they have learned and leave feeling impressed with themselves and what they can do differently as a result of the content you shared. There are many options for interactive closing activities, including: a) word searches, where you identify the word and then text chat what is one thing they learned about that word; b) “huddles,” where you ask participants in online breakout rooms to discuss their top “take-away”; and c) training games, such as jeopardy, where instead of you telling them, they are telling you what they have learned.

Allow appropriate time for questions.

If you are going to address participant questions during the webinar, make certain that you have time *during* the webinar to do that. More than likely, attendees have dedicated a certain amount of time to participating and you want to be respectful of that by ending on time. If your planned format calls for you to address questions at only one designated time rather than throughout the presentation, plan to do this two-thirds of the way through the time-slot, otherwise you are bound to run over. Alternatively, rather than taking questions during the webinar, offer a way to communicate questions and answers after the webinar, such as through email, or website blog.

Support transfer of learning.

Adults learn best when they can immediately use new information and skills. If the purpose of your webinar is training – to help participants learn new job knowledge or job skills, then the webinar needs to provide practical information that can be used on the job – sooner rather than later. **How will participants apply what they have learned?** Identify specific strategies for how information or skills covered during the webinar can be used by participants. This can be achieved directly by the presenters, or by asking participants what they have learned and how they intend to use that information or skill. Also, identify where learners can gain support for their change in job behavior once they have returned to their work place if they have questions or encounter barriers. **What resources are available** to help support transfer of learning? Skills, for example, are learned through practice – and best when people can gain feedback. So, for instance, can you offer a follow-up phone teleconference for learners to report back on their practice experiences and discuss with each other their challenges and successes? Or, as another example, can you provide a tool, such as a skills observation worksheet, which can be used by learners, their coworkers, or their supervisors?

Plan for post-webinar learners

Many times today, webinars are offered with the intent of recording and making them available for future viewing by individuals who were not participants in the webinar itself. Often his intent is held with the assumption that one only needs to be passive in a webinar by viewing or listening to it, rather than *participate* actively in the webinar, to learn. Unless a learner is simply seeking a specific piece of information for immediate use, passive learning is fairly ineffective in the long-term. Consider what you can do to help facilitate the learning of future webinar viewers. Can you offer a learning task list which providing users with a set of activities they can do o assist with their learning, such as interview a coworker, practice a certain skill, visit a certain website, etc., that is archived with the webinar itself, for example? Or as another example, could you plan for the presenter(s) to address anticipated viewers with language such as “For those of you who are viewing this webinar after it’s been archived, I want you to also....”?