

Best Practices for Blended Online Trainings

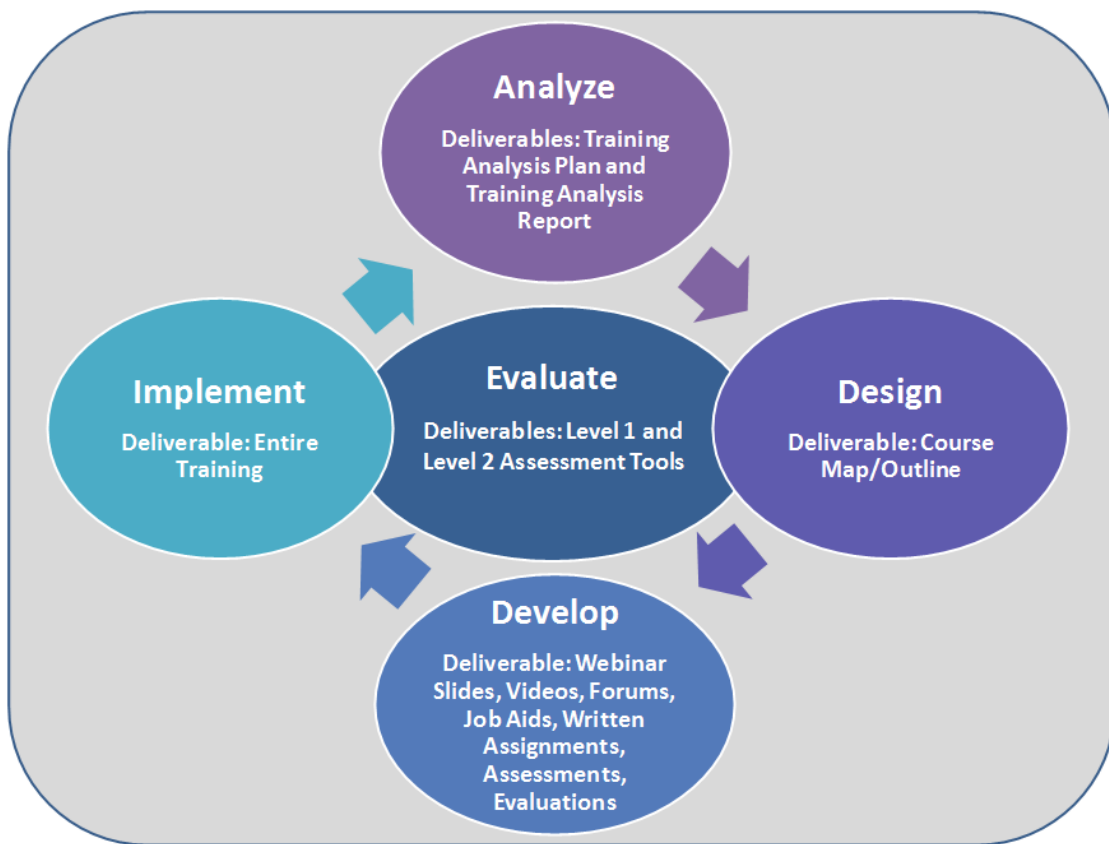


Document Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the steps and best practices for developing blended online training. Blended online training uses both self-paced training components (i.e., Participants can access learning material at any time and they are not required to be online at the same time as the instructor) and real-time training components (i.e., Participants and the instructor are online at the same time) in one training. It provides a high-level look at the design and development process and the roles and responsibilities of those involved with the process, and guidance and best practices to avoid pitfalls in the design and development process.

Process for Creating Online Blended Training

A common process to follow when designing online training is ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate).



Analyze

Designing a training starts with identifying the problem or need as well as the target audience for the training. Once these are clearly established, the instructional designer (ID) begins to gather data to assess what participants need to know. Usually, this is gathered in a needs assessment. The needs assessment tells the designer about the participants, what they may already know, and what they need

to know; and narrows down how to best help participants acquire knowledge by taking the training. Data can be gathered in a variety of ways, depending on time and resources – through focus groups, interviews, observations, and questionnaires, for example.

After a needs assessment is conducted and the data is analyzed, the ID works with a subject matter expert (SME) to identify the goals for the training and learning objectives.

Design

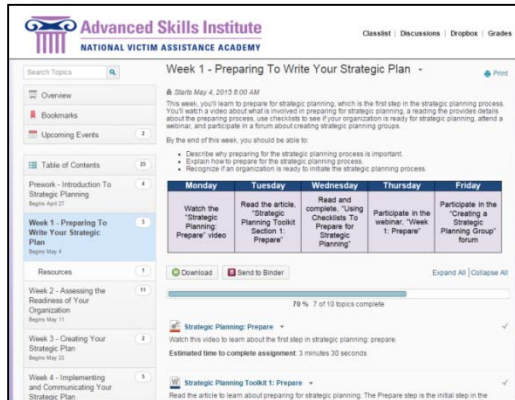
The training goals identify what the learner will be able to accomplish as a result of the entire training. The learning objectives identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the participant will need to achieve to meet the training goals. The goals and learning objectives guide the development of the training content. The SME and ID develop a content map, or detailed outline, for the specific content pieces that the ID organizes in a logical way for participants. The ID also uses the learning objectives to create assessment questions to check the participants's knowledge of the content.

The ID and SME go through several iterations of the outline to finalize the content. Once the content is finalized, the ID begins to develop the content to be presented in the training including webinar slides, video storyboards, forums, job aids, written assignments, assessments, and evaluations. Many of these activities will live on a training site within a learning management system (LMS), an organized site for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of electronic educational technology (also called e-learning) courses or training programs.

The training site is the "home base" of the training. It contains the schedule for the training as well as activities that participants will complete to prepare for the week's upcoming webinar. Pre-webinar activities should not exceed 2 hours per week. An alternative to activities is to provide resources that participants can access prior to the training to familiarize themselves with the week's topic.

When designing the training, make sure to correctly estimate the content that appears on the training site, such as the course description, for how long it should take to complete self-paced activities. Make sure to communicate that the timings are estimates. If many people provide feedback on the accuracy of the length of the activity, revisit your estimates.

Asynchronous (Self-Paced) Content



Self-paced content includes activities that are completed by participants outside of the webinar. These content elements introduce the subject matter, which the webinar helps anchor. Self-paced content may include activities such as watching videos, participating in a forum/discussion, completing an assessment, or reading short articles.

Assessments

Assessments help gauge where participants are in their knowledge of the subject matter. Assessments can be delivered during a webinar, but usually it is best to deliver them with the self-paced content because an instructor isn't necessary to deliver most assessments. Assessments are usually a series of multiple choice or open-ended short-answer questions that are scored to provide participants with an indication of how much they have learned; deliver a pre-assessment before the training starts and a post-assessment after the training to measure any improvements in knowledge and comprehension.

Forums

A forum is an organized discussion thread that takes place asynchronously and at a participant's own pace. Forums provide a way for participants to discuss an idea or activity with a group. It is important that a participant both creates a post to share their idea, but also reviews and comments on others' posts as well to spark conversations. Some of the most valuable experiences in online learning can come from peer-to-peer sharing in forums and discussions. Make sure to emphasize that participants chat with each other in the forums not only to respond to questions or discuss assignments, but to respond to others as well. This sharing can help strengthen and solidify learning, and can create networking opportunities in the group.

Written Assignments

Written assignments allow participants to reflect on what they've learned, or start applying what they've learned. For instance, if participants need to develop an ongoing plan for change, they can document and chart the evolution of this plan in an assignment to submit to the instructor for feedback.

Job Aids

Job aids are documents or tools that can help the participant apply what they have learned in the training after they return to the office. They are quick reminders and tools that don't take a lot of time to review and read to get the information necessary to perform a task.

Videos

Videos can provide ways to demonstrate and model concepts that a participant should know. Videos also can provide a quick overview of a topic that can lead into other assignments to complete during the week.

Evaluations

Evaluations are important to include in the training site to gauge the participant's experience with the training. The information gathered can inform the Instructional Designer on changes needed to be made to the content, materials, and overall structure of the training. Gathering information on the instructor also is valuable to understanding the effectiveness of the instructor.

Webinar Slide Handouts

Webinar slide handouts provide participants a way to review the slides before the webinar and take notes during the webinar. A helpful way to structure the slide handouts is to save them as a PDF; the three-slide-per-page format includes space for notes. If any changes happen during the practice session of a webinar, those changes also should be applied to the handout.

Determining Appropriate Content

Making sure that the content you are delivering online is appropriate for the medium is very important. This includes how useful and engaging the content is, and how to deliver it in the best way. Keep the following tips in mind when determining the best mode of delivery (webinar, forum, assignment, video, etc.) for the content.

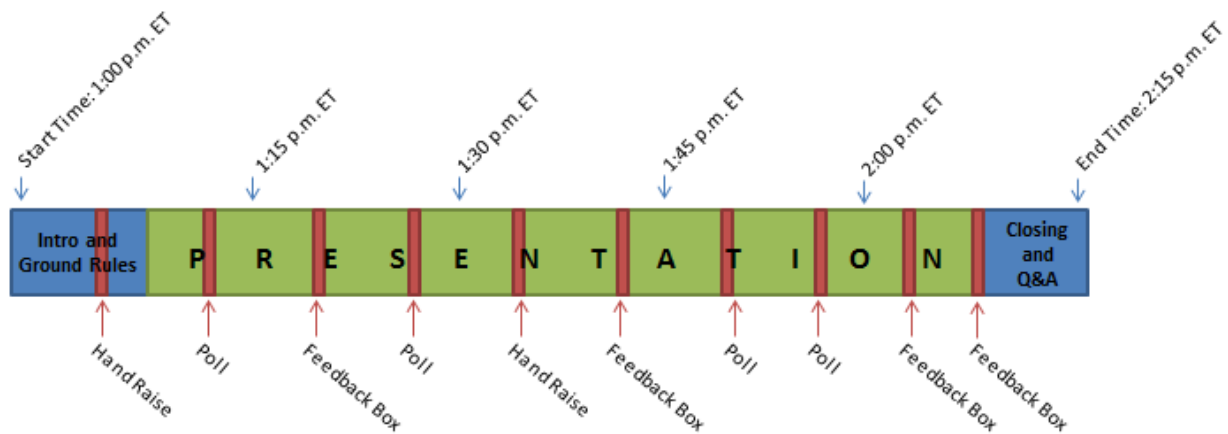
- If the content will need an indepth review, consider using a video to break down and chunk the content into easy-to-follow pieces. You also may be able to use multiple modes, such as a video overview of the content, and more indepth reading.
- If you are looking for participants to synthesize and demonstrate what they have learned, consider having participants complete an assignment to submit to the instructor for review. This gives participants a chance to think about what they are learning and craft thorough answers.
- If you want participants to interact and exchange ideas with each other, consider creating a forum. Make sure to tell participants that it is OK to read each other's postings and respond to them. This will help build conversations among the learners and build peer-to-peer sharing networks.

Develop

Webinars

Structuring the Webinar

When you develop a training to be delivered via webinar, make sure to structure it to balance time for the presentation, interactions, and questions. Sometimes, you will want to plot out the timing of your webinars. Below is an example of plotting the structure and timing of a webinar that runs for 75 minutes, which is what OVC TTAC generally recommend for most webinars. The blue areas indicate the



opening and closing of the webinar. The green area represents the presentation time. The red lines note possible interactions during the webinar.

Creating Slides

Keep in mind your slide count. If you stay on the same slide for more than 90 seconds, participants may begin to disengage from the training. There are general rules you should follow that will help you pace your webinar. Table 1 provides recommendations for the number of slides per length of webinar.

Table 1 – Recommended Slides per Length of Webinar

Presentation Duration	Recommended Slides
30 minutes	20 – 30 slides
60 minutes	30 – 50 slides
90 minutes	60 – 80 slides

Information retrieved from: www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/1382/best-practices-planning-a-great-virtual-training-event

When developing slides, make sure the slides make a good use of graphics and less use of words. Have no more than 3-5 short bullets on a slide. If you need to include more, use animations and transitions to keep the slide interesting. If you can, use a graphic to represent an idea instead of a word.

In order to keep your instructor on track for narration, you can include bulleted lists or a detailed script in the notes section of each PPT slide. Also include slide timings that shows slide time and cumulative time. (For example, 1:00/34:00 in the notes could represent a slide that is 1 minute long and should be covered around 34 minutes into the webinar.)

There are several practices to implement to deliver a successful and engaging webinar. Those practices include:

- Assigning roles and responsibilities to the producer, instructor, and tech representative.
- Structuring your content to appropriate timings to ensure participants stay engaged.
- Adding interactivity to keep participants engaged and check knowledge comprehension.
- Rehearsing the flow of the session during a practice session.
- Providing strong technical support.
- Anchoring the content and learning from webinars in asynchronous (self-paced) activities.

Developing Interactivity

Interactions keep participants engaged. The fewer interactions you use, the more likely participants will passively listen rather than actively participating in the session. You should make sure that you spend no more than 1 minute 30 seconds per slide, and you should sequence using interactivity (such as a poll question, chat question, or showing a video) once every 3 to 4 minutes. If your webinar platform offers it, use a tool that measures how engaged participants are with your session. Make notes about the level of engagement in order to improve levels for future sessions. Below are recommendations on how many interactions you should have during a given presentation duration.

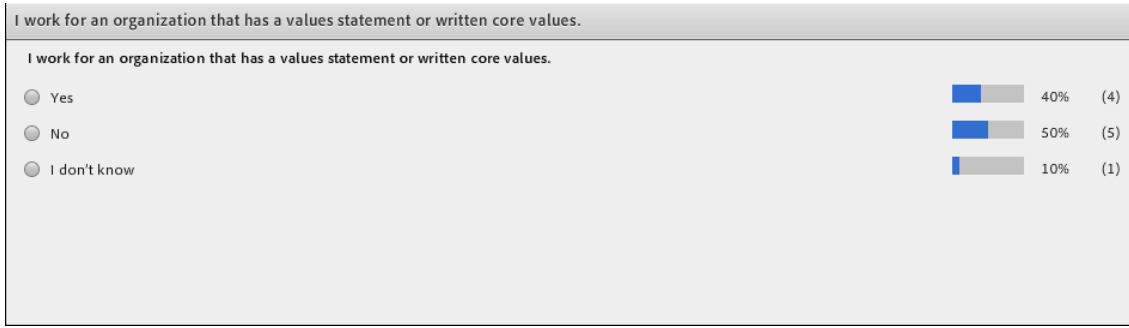
Table 2 – Recommended Interactions per Length of Webinar

Presentation Duration	Recommended Slides
30 minutes	5 – 6 interactions
60 minutes	10 – 12 interactions
90 minutes	15 – 18 interactions

Information retrieved from: www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/1382/best-practices-planning-a-great-virtual-training-event

Polls

Polls allow you to gauge the reaction of the participants to a question. Polls can be Likert measures or knowledge assessments. Polling options include multiple-choice single-answer responses, multiple-choice multiple-answer responses, and short answer. Polls give you real time results and data that you can use during the session to explain content further, or to use as data when developing other content.



Chat

Feedback Box (Everyone)

Kate Henderson: I enjoyed the details of VT as well. So perhaps a combination of the two.

Amanda Powers: Including victim's stories helped ground the plan for me and provide real examples of why things needed to change or improve. The promising practices also gave the strategic plan an additional positive feel in the sense that yes we have these issues to address but here are some ways that this is currently being addressed and maybe we can build off of this.

Amanda Powers: that was in Hawaii's plan

Ricki Hammett: I liked Pennsylvania's plan - it is visually appealing, includes info. on mental health and evidence based programs

Chat can be used to ask participants for feedback on a subject or to respond to questions from a presenter. The chat can provide more long-form responses from participants. Also, participants may share thoughts or ideas through the chat feature while the presentation is taking place.

Videos

Videos can help demonstrate an idea, set up a scenario, or introduce content. Videos should be no longer than 3-5 minutes and should be saved in a format supported by your webinar platform.

Whiteboard

Depending on the system you use, you may be able to use a whiteboard activity. This allows users to draw on the screen, make notes, or share an idea with the rest of the group, much like using a whiteboard in an actual in-person meeting.

Breakout Rooms

Breakout rooms, if your webinar system provides access to those, function like a breakout room in a face-to-face training. Participants are organized into several groups to share ideas or work on an activity. When the breakout room is finished, the entire group comes back together to share their findings and thoughts with everyone.

Implement

Delivering Successful Webinars

Webinars are designed to provide real-time interaction with the instructor and participants. When delivered in blended trainings, these sessions should complement what participants have learned throughout the week leading up to the webinar, provide for application of learning, and present new information that allows participants to build on learning from previous weeks.

Preparing for the Practice Session

Rehearsals and practice are key to successful webinars. The producer of the webinar is in charge of setting up the content for the webinar. The producer ensures that the instructor has the PPT slides and feels prepared to conduct the practice session. The practice session should be delivered as though it is the live session. The producer will need to:

- Upload the PPTs.
- Create polls.
- Upload any videos.
- Prepare the layout of the screen.

The producer and instructor should both have printed copies of the slides available in case there are technical issues with the webinar. Each slide will have an estimate of how much time to spend on that slide.

Here are a few tips you should share with your instructors before the practice session.

- Use a land line. Cell phones can get back reception or even drop calls. If your system allows it, you may be able to use voice over IP (VoIP) as long as you have a good and reliable headset.
- Be prepared. Review the slides before the practice session, and be sure to ask questions if any content seems unclear.

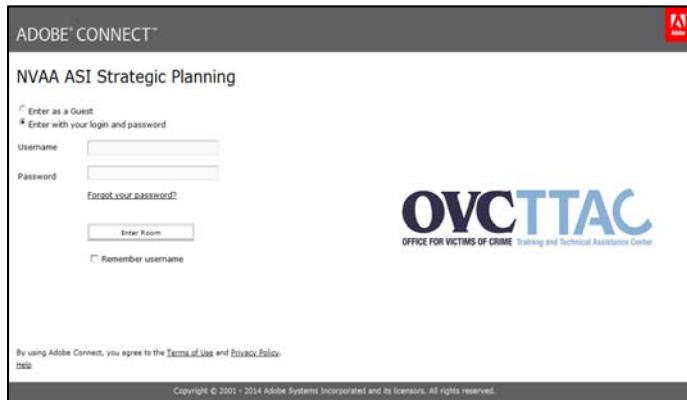
- Speak naturally and with authority and clarity. You may be provided with a script, but use the script simply as a guide. It is important to put the information into your own words.
- Don't shuffle papers. Sometimes the sound can be picked up by your phone and participants on the call can hear you.
- Smile when speaking. People can hear your smile as you speak. Also, vary your pitch and inflection to make your voice interesting to listen to.
- Keep a glass of water nearby. You'll be speaking for a long time and your voice may become harsh after a little bit.
- Test the webinar software you will be using the day prior to the practice session. This will help iron out any technological issues in the computer.
- Keep a printout of the slides nearby in case something happens with the webinar connection.
- Encourage people to chat with each other during webinars and to share ideas in the forum/discussion areas after the webinar. Networking can be incredibly helpful for people. It can help people with less experience in a subject connect with those with more experience. It also can help people in similar geographic areas connect so that they can continue their learning after the online sessions are over.

Plan for Emergencies

Emergencies happen: Servers crash, phones stop working, the instructor is delayed. Make sure to have an effective backup plan in case issues arise. These tips, provided by Adobe, can help make sure your event is successful in light of these issues:

- Print slides – Each presenter should have a printout of all presentation slides. If connection is lost, the presenter can continue talking through the presentation while a moderator or co-presenter advances the slides for the audience.
- Separate networks – Instructors and producers should be on separate Internet hubs or networks. If one system drops because of a local Internet failure, the other participant can continue to advance slides for the audience.
- Backup for no access to the webinar – There may be times where there is nothing you can do if the web portion of your webinar isn't working. To continue the session, provide PPT slides to participants and hold the session via conference call. This will remove interactions you planned, but you'll still be able to deliver the content. If phones and the web aren't working, schedule an emergency time with your presenter to deliver the webinar as though it was live, record it, and send it to participants when it is ready.

Delivering the Practice Session



The tech support representative should be present to open the webinar room 1 hour before the practice session to allow time for the producer to set up the session. The producer also should log in 1 hour prior to the start of the webinar session to find and resolve any technical issues.

The instructor and any other test participants (individuals participating in the rehearsal) who attend the practice session

should sign in 15 minutes prior to the start of the session. If possible, start the session promptly at the scheduled start time. If the webinar is delayed for any reason, let participants know. If audio is working, provide a message verbally. If audio is not working, post a notice prominently on the screen.

As the webinar proceeds, make sure to take timing notes on a printed version of the slides. This will help make sure you stay on track with the timings noted in the script.

The producer launches all polls and interactive elements of the webinar. The producer also provides poll results as well as any comments or questions posted in the feedback box.

As the practice webinar concludes, allow time for comments from test participants and the instructor. The producer should take notes and make any changes necessary to the slides; if changes are content related, consult the ID to make the changes.

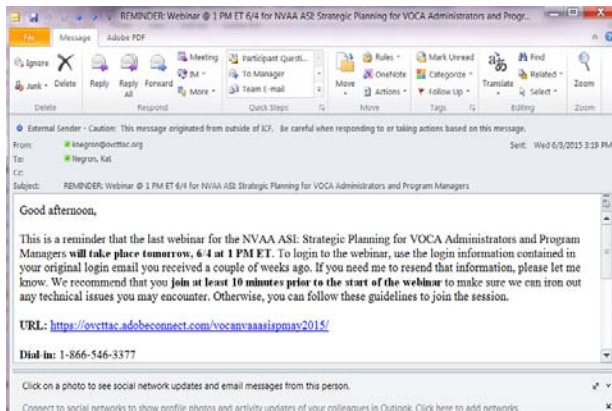
Updates After the Practice Session

If there is a small typo or minimal edit that needs to be made to the slides, the producer can make the changes and send the updated slides to the instructor. The updated slides also should be sent to the ID for use in future sessions.

If there is an error in a slide and content changes need to be made, the ID should make those changes, in conjunction with the SME if necessary.

Minor wording changes to polls should be made by the producer, and all changes sent to the ID to update any slides to be used in future sessions.

Post Reminders to Complete Assignments and Attend the Webinar



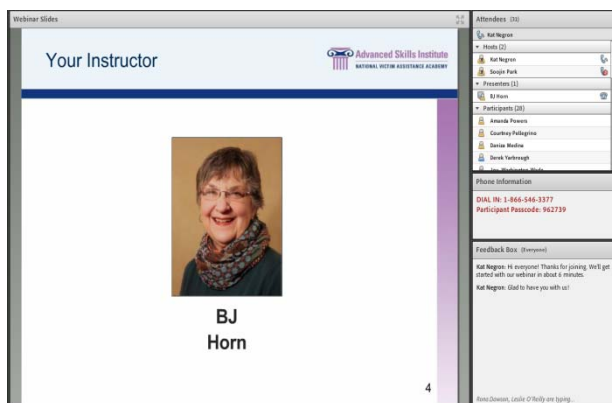
Before the webinar, be sure to post a reminder for participants to attend the webinar both on the training site and via e-mail. A reminder for the webinar that includes detailed login information should be e-mailed to participants by close of business 2 days prior to the webinar. The reminder on the training site should be posted to the News section the morning of the webinar. It also should include a reminder to complete any pre-webinars work prior to attending the webinar.

Preparing for the Live Session

Preparation for the live webinar will be very similar to the practice session. Make sure the instructor has everything they need (login information, updated PPTs, and print out of slides) to conduct the webinar. The producer will need to:

- Upload the revised PPTs if changes have been made.
- Create polls if changes have been made.
- Upload any videos.
- Finalize the layout of the screen.

Delivering the Live Session



The tech support representative should be present to open the webinar room 1 hour before the live session to allow time for the producer to set up the session. The producer also should log in 1 hour prior to the start of the webinar session to find and resolve technical issues.

The instructor and any other observers who attend the session should sign in 15 minutes prior to the start of the live session. The producer should start the recording of the webinar 2 minutes before the webinar start time.

The tech support representative is in charge of setting up the phone and/or VoIP lines for the session and admits participants into the room. The tech support representative is in charge of muting and unmuting participants, while the producer is in charge of muting or unmuting the instructor.

Allow a minute or two after the scheduled start time for participants to join, then begin the session. The producer launches all polls and interactive pieces of the webinar. The producer also should provide the results to polls over the air, as well as any pieces of feedback or questions that come into the feedback box.

Followup After the Live Session

After the webinar ends, the producer receives the attendee list and the link to the webinar recording from the tech support representative. The producer sends the webinar recording to the ID who built the training site so that it can be posted. The producer should post a News story to the training site alerting participants to the availability of the recording.

Evaluate

The producer will host a conference call for the team immediately following the webinar. This call, sometimes called a debrief, allows the team of the producer, instructor, tech support representative, and others who observed the webinar to share what went well, what didn't, and how to improve the webinar for future delivery.

Evaluations should be built as part of the training site (see the section on Design in this document). The evaluation will ensure that you can capture feedback from participants on the overall training. It provides information regarding the usefulness of different activities and how to improve activities that may not meet the mark according to participant opinions.

Roles and Responsibilities for Blended Trainings

Instructional Designer (ID): Designs and develops the training materials and the training site. The ID reviews participant evaluations to determine training revisions.

Instructor: Consultant or subject matter expert (SME) who delivers the content of the webinar. The instructor:

- Reviews PPT slides provided by the producer in preparation for the webinar.
- Delivers the webinar as the main speaker during the session, following the script as well as adding their own experiences and thoughts to the material.
- Answers content questions from participants.
- Comments and provides feedback on feedback box and poll results.

Observer: May attend the webinar to see how the session runs. This could potentially be the requestor of the training.

Producer: Staff member who runs the webinar. The producer:

- Prepares the instructor for the webinar.
- Tests PPT slides in the webinar platform.
- Uploads all materials such as PPTs and videos, creates polls, and generates other interactive elements.
- Comments on feedback box and poll results.
- Launches and facilitates polls.
- Answers administrative questions from participants.
- Receives attendee reports from Tech Support.
- Records the webinar session.

Tech Support: Provides technical support during the webinar. The tech support representative:

- Helps participants, instructors, and producers who are having technical difficulties.
- Creates and opens the webinar room to be used during the session.
- Sends a public link to the producer for the webinar recording.
- Sends attendee spreadsheet to producer.

Resources and Additional Readings

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Sample Checklist for Setting Up Training Site

Task	Task	Notes
Create slides from copy of most recently delivered session, if one exists		
Update start dates for each week		
Update pre- and post-assessment dates		
Update all News postings to post correct stories on the correct days		
Update all calendar entries for the start of each week and all webinars (and include login link for the webinars in each entry)		
Create new weekly schedules that appear in the week descriptions, if needed (for instance, if a holiday occurs during a week)		
Create login information for presenters (set them as participants in the overall training site, but administrators for the training)		
Create participant logins in csv template and batch upload them (do not send a creation e-mail when they are created)		
Enroll participants in the training		
Send login email		

Template Checklist for Setting Up Webinar

Task	Due Date	Date Complete	Owner
Design-related			
Identify learning objectives			ID
Practice session			
Open webinar room			Tech Rep
Day of webinar			
Open webinar room			Tech Rep
After the webinar			
Post recording to training site			Producer

Template Event Day Checklist

Time	Task	Owner	Complete?
Before webinar			
1 hour prior	Open webinar room	Tech Rep	
2 minutes prior	Start recording	Tech Rep	
During webinar			
At start	Introduce webinar	Producer	
After webinar			
Immediately after	Start debrief call	Producer	