

Planning of virtual training and lessons learnt



These lessons learnt were compiled by the Capacity Building Department (CBD) following a virtual training for Veterinary paraprofessional (VPP) experts organised in April-May 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown, to replace what would have been a face-face workshop in March. Many principles of the virtual format were informed by participation in the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) workshop organised by Isabelle Dieuzy-Labaye in April.

General tips and principles of organisation

- In advance of the scheduled workshop, provide participants with factual information, presentations, audio presentations, online resources, etc., as relevant, through email and shared folders for their review in preparation for the virtual meetings/workshops.
- Provide a sufficient interval for review of the materials and have a tracking system and timeline for completion of the reviews.
- Provide an opportunity and platform for participants to ask questions, make comments and receive clarifications.
- Use virtual meetings/workshops (e.g. via Zoom) to maximise information 'exchange' through group discussions, break-out rooms, etc.
- Support the process with a 'map' of the learning journey – explaining to participants where different information is stored, what it is for, how to get the most out of it, how to prepare in advance.

- Host a 'test' session a day or two before the event so that everyone can test the technology, practise going into break-out rooms, share their screen, see the different views (gallery/speaker view) and test any other relevant zoom functionalities, with technical support from a member of the IT Team.
- Ask everyone to log in to sessions 15 minutes early – this allows time for troubleshooting technical problems, for informal conversation and for getting to know each other, and ensures the event can start on time.
- Share a list of instructions for effectively using Zoom and the virtual format. For example, with advice from the IT Team, the following guidance was shared with participants ahead of the virtual workshops:

Technical (IT) considerations

- You will need a good internet connection (1Mbps) to be able to connect on Zoom (our virtual meeting technology).
- We will invite you to a trial Zoom session in advance of the workshop to verify that the technology works for everyone.
- We request that you be able to fully dedicate yourself to the workshop during the virtual meeting e.g. close your emails and other distractions.
- If possible, please enable video conferencing using your computer webcam.
- Be in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted and use a headset to minimise background noise.
- Connect 15 minutes early to each session to check your connection.
- Ensure that your internet browser is Chrome (best) or Mozilla, but not Explorer (as Explorer does not always allow screen sharing).
- Be patient, open-minded and creative in using the technology and interacting with colleagues in order to get to know each other, share your expertise, listen attentively and collectively help the group get the most out of the event!

Experience sharing from virtual training

The virtual training was structured as two separate parts: 1) Virtual platform and 2) Virtual workshops. The training involved 18 participants, 2 CBD facilitators, and several CBD staff members as observers.

Virtual platform

- A detailed programme was shared with participants to help them navigate through all the folders of material provided on the virtual platform. The programme summarised the learning objectives of the material in each folder and offered 'Questions for reflection' for participants to think about as they read through it.
- A learning survey (described below) was used to capture participants' learning and questions as they worked through the material.
- Much of the training content was provided by participants, and we asked them to make PowerPoint presentations with audio/video recording. Whilst this meant the presentations were quite time-consuming to listen to (as compared to reading through a presentation on one's own), it meant that the quality of information shared was much richer, with more detail and examples shared through the

audio recording. It also gave more of an 'experience' of being in a workshop. Participants also had the option to read the PowerPoint presentations without the audio.

- Participants and facilitators were invited to share their professional biographies and a photo on a shared document ahead of the workshop, allowing everyone to 'get to know each other' virtually, and meaning time was not needed to introduce ourselves at the start of the workshop. This was very helpful.

Follow-up virtual workshops

- By the time the virtual workshops started, participants were quite familiar with the factual material and had a good common knowledge of the technical issues at hand, thanks to the Platform.
- From an interpersonal point of view, they were quite at ease with each other thanks to having interacted informally during the test session and by logging in early.
- Each workshop started with a brief introduction by the facilitators to explain the objectives and programme (shared in advance by email).
- Question and answer sessions were organised at the start of each workshop session, using questions or feedback shared by participants in advance, thus minimising time needed for asking questions, and giving facilitators time to prepare clear responses ahead of time. Additional questions were invited from participants during the live workshop.
- Overall virtual workshop facilitation requires facilitators to be slightly more directive than might be the case in a face-to-face workshop, where there is more opportunity for impromptu conversation and consideration of individual needs. That said, it is important to allow time for questions/participant contributions throughout the session to keep everybody engaged.
- Facilitators should pay attention to levels of participation and when necessary, encourage the participation of reticent individuals while not allowing others to dominate the interactions.

Steps to integrate feedback and learning

Learning survey

- A detailed 'learning survey' was issued to participants after launching the Virtual Platform in order to gather their reflections and questions upon reading and watching the presentations. The results of this learning survey were used to structure Q&A discussion during the workshops and to inform the facilitators of the participants' level and breadth of knowledge, interest and learning needs. Anonymous results were shared with all participants.

Workshop feedback form

- A feedback form was available for participants to respond to simple content and process questions after the first 2 workshops. This allowed the facilitators to review responses and answer outstanding questions from the prior sessions during each subsequent Q&A.
- The form also allowed participants to 'talk to each other', serving as an impromptu 'discussion forum'. Since the purpose of the training was to encourage knowledge sharing, this was a positive outcome and an idea which could be developed for future events.

Workshop evaluation

- A post-workshop evaluation survey was completed by participants one week after the virtual workshops. The information has informed organisational learning on the procedural aspects of organising virtual training and indicated outstanding training needs and next steps for the programme.

Suggestions from participants for maximising effectiveness of online events

Organisation

- Having practical information in advance of the event is helpful.
- Hosting a 'test session' to test the Zoom technology is useful.
- If the topic is complex, having meeting days at intervals (with a few days in-between each event) is optimal, as this allows participants time to reflect on the themes covered and do any further reading before the next session.
- Break-out groups can be effective for engaging participants.

Timing

- Maximum length for an online event should be about 3 hours, with at least 2 short (5-minute) breaks during that time.
- Ensure sufficient time is given for break-out sessions to allow everyone to participate.
- Keep instructions and objectives of break-out sessions clear and simple.

Recording

- Participants may ask for the session to be recorded. It would be useful to decide ahead of time whether recording the sessions is appropriate or not and how the recording will be disseminated (in line with data protection rules). Note that if sessions are recorded, you may want to stop recording during breaks where informal conversations happen, and meeting facilitators need to remember to turn the recording on/off as required.
- Do not forget to take a 'group photo' of the gathering whilst everyone has their videos on.

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