

Appendix E: Using Webinars in Distance Education Pilots

Using Webinars in Distance Education Pilots

Conducting regular webinars with each of the distance education sites in your state is a valuable component of distance learning experiments. These webinars can fill a variety of roles, including:

- Providing ongoing updates about the process of implementing the distance education programs, including recruiting and orienting students, teaching, and working with the various curricula
- Providing a forum in which teachers and administrators at the sites can share information and provide support for each other's efforts
- Exploring larger issues related to the goal of integrating distance education into a wider choice of adult education offerings

There are a number of free webinar tools that you can use to run your meeting. If everyone involved has a Google account, you can use [Google Meet](#). [Zoom](#) is very easy to use and allows you to easily transfer presentation and screen sharing to other participants. You could also check with the organization that runs technical support or professional development for adult education in your state. They might have a license for [Adobe Connect](#), [WebEx](#), [GoToMeeting](#), or other paid web conferencing software.

For webinars to serve these functions effectively, they need to be carefully planned and moderated. Structuring the webinars allows the moderator to keep the group on task and allows the participants to address all issues of concern. Two things are useful in this regard. One is to send an email a week ahead of the webinar asking for some information to help establish the agenda. The second is to circulate the agenda two days in advance of the webinar.

The first email requesting information serves several purposes:

- It allows the moderator to be informed about the status of the sites and their concerns before the webinar. This allows the moderator to adjust the agenda, if needed, and guides the moderator in thinking about how to structure the webinar.
- It encourages sites to reflect on their progress and the issues they face in implementing and maintaining their distance learning projects.
- It provides the foundation for a brief opening statement from each site on the webinar.

The template for information should be short and simple and should reflect the issues to be covered in a particular webinar. There is likely to be a considerable amount of repetition in the templates used over time; for example, reporting on the number of students served and recruitment methods.

Examples of some templates requesting information are provided below.

Examples of Webinar Agenda

Site Summary Webinars

The following conference agenda templates were used for a series of four monthly webinars conducted for a group of sites just beginning their distance program. A week before the webinar, each site was sent an email with a template to complete and return to the person who would be moderating the webinar.

Month 1

As of (date), we had __ students in the program. To orient students to the distance learning class and the technology, we.... The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are.... We would characterize our overall progress as.... We are trying to figure out how to solve the following problems....

Month 2

As of (date), we had __ students in the program. The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are.... We would characterize student retention in the program as.... We are defining “dropouts” as students who.... The biggest issues for our site are....

Month 3

As of (date), we had __ students enrolled in the program. We consider __ to be active distance students. The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are.... The two most difficult problems we are trying to solve are....

Month 4

In the final webinar of this phase of the project, we will look back at the project thus far. To help get the process started, please respond briefly to the following questions before the webinar:

- In what ways did this program work well for your target population?
- What changes would you make for next year’s project, and why?

Sample Moderator Guides for Conference Webinars

For each phase of the pilot, there should be a webinar. For example, in Month 1, you will focus on the first aspect of the pilot or site plan: recruitment. If you are moderating the webinar and have read through each organization’s site plan, you may recall one organization that made a remarkable contribution to the way that recruitment could occur. Consider inviting such an organization to do a short presentation on the innovation during the webinar.

Phased Implementation Webinar Series

This is an example of a five-month piloting initiative. The participants come together each month for general updates, but focus each month on one area of implementation.

Month 1 Webinar

- Welcome, introductions of all on the webinar.
- Set out topics for discussion: recruitment (likely primary focus of first webinar), orientation, student access to the Internet, distributing print materials to students. Any others important to participants?
- Recruitment
 - Ask each person to give a **brief** (1 min.) overview of what their site is doing to recruit students.
 - Short presentation from an organization doing remarkable work. Look for common threads/concerns.
 - How are you working with other organizations?
 - Talk about successes: what seems to be working in terms of recruiting? Brainstorming on how to handle problems (if any) encountered at sites.
- Other concerns raised by participants.
- Reminder of the next scheduled webinar.

Month 2 Webinar

- Set out topics for discussion: orientation, materials distribution, student support and feedback, what is and is not working for programs.
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled, method of orientation, method of student support, overall sense of progress). Look for common threads/concerns.
- Assessing Readiness and Orientation:
 - What are sites doing to make sure they have students who are ready for distance learning? What are sites doing to orient students to both the online component and the idea of independent learning?
 - Does what you are doing differ from what you anticipated? If so, what prompted you to make changes?
 - How are you doing orientation for blended learning classes?
 - Short presentation from an organization doing remarkable work.
- Share ideas about how sites are helping students access the internet. Other concerns raised by participants.
- Reminder of the next scheduled webinar.

Month 3 Webinar

- Set out topics for discussion: student support and feedback, retention, definition of “dropout,” issues sites are trying to resolve.
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled, method(s) of student support, concerns about retention, overall sense of progress). Look for common threads/concerns.
- Involved Instruction: Describe what this looks like at your site. Complementary/supplemental instructional materials: What are you using? Are you using a learning management system (LMS) or class website to organize and distribute? How is it working?
- Student support and feedback:
 - How are you providing feedback and support to students? Does this differ from what you anticipated? If so, why were the changes necessary? What methods, if any, are more effective, and why? Does this differ for different students?
- Student retention:
 - How would you characterize retention of students? Does this differ from your other programs? If so, how? What are you doing to increase student retention? What do you see as the major obstacles to retaining students in the program?
- “Dropouts”
 - How is your site defining a “dropout”? How does this differ from your other programs? Do you have any recommendations on dealing with this issue?
- Major issues sites are addressing. Other concerns raised by participants.

Month 4 Webinar

- Set out topics for discussion: student attrition, assessment, planning for final report.
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled/active, method(s) of student support, concerns about retention, overall sense of progress). Look for common threads/concerns.
- Student attrition:
 - Have any of your students “dropped” from the program? How do you define a “dropout”? Although your program has only been running for one to two months, can you say how the dropout rate compares with your classroom-based programs? In the next month, you will need to contact your “dropouts” to find out why they didn’t stay with the program. Will it be easy to contact them?
- Assessment: How are you measuring learner progress? Which of the assessment strategies laid out in the Handbook are you using?
- Planning your final report: How would you rewrite your organization plan in light of this experience?

Month 5 Webinar

The final webinar might be for wrapping up the pilot and looking ahead for future program improvement. Here is some suggested text for the invitation and webinar facilitation:

This webinar will give us an opportunity to explore two major issues as a group:

1. How well did each of the pilot projects work for your populations?
2. What changes do you think should be implemented to make the programs more successful in the next iteration?

We are not hoping to come to conclusions in this webinar, but, rather, our goal will be to point the way for future projects to learn from your experiences. To help get the process started, please respond to the following questions and email them to me before the webinar.

1. In what ways did this program work well for your target population?
2. What changes would you make for the next project, and why?



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