



BHR BUREAU OF
HUMAN
RESOURCES



Virtual Learning Best Practices

Virtual Learning Environment

We encourage you to think about which of your meeting and training strategies will translate well to a remote setting, which ones won't, and what new approaches you might want to incorporate. Below are some best practices and suggestions for increasing engagement so your virtual participants can optimize their training experience.



Determine your priorities: As you think about continuing training online, consider what you can realistically accomplish and what should be postponed until restrictions are lifted. Be sure to keep in mind the impact this situation may have on employees' ability to attend virtual trainings.



Transitioning learning environments: As we return to worksites, employees will need time to adjust to a post-pandemic environment, which will create a more focused and meaningful setting as we transition back to facilitator-led trainings.



Facilitator led courses: As you prepare to move your facilitator-led course online, one question to consider is whether you want to train entirely live or create pre-recorded sessions, then utilize live sessions for more interactive discussions or smaller group work.



Pre-recorded Trainings: The most effective pre-recorded training sessions can be as engaging as the best live trainings since they can be created with multiple takes, can be edited, and can integrate graphics and animations. They are also less likely to have bandwidth issues that may occur with live sessions.



Facilitator Considerations

Audio matters: Plan to use a good headset, possibly one with an attached microphone. Ensure the participants are aware ahead of time of what they will need in order to participate with audio/video. Consider providing a dial-in number for contractors and employees who don't have access to microphones.

Slide preparation: Put your slides in a consistent, distributable format (pdf).

Don't assume participants know how to use the technology: Begin sessions by explaining how to participate. Raise virtual hand, chat, etc.

Practice (at least once) in advance: With your co-facilitator(s), rehearse using [Share Screen](#) and switching among the windows you intend to display.

Don't expect to master hosting virtual trainings on Day 1: You will learn (fast) but be transparent with participants if you are still in the process of mastering the technique.

Consider having an administrator join the session to manage the chat and handle any technical issues that may arise. If you don't have an administrator and have access to another device, consider logging in as a participant to monitor any delays and have visibility into what participants see.

Keep your normal pace: Just because things are delivered electronically does not mean you should speed up or slow down. Consider checking in with your participants more frequently than you might normally to make sure they remain engaged.

Set Training Room Norms

Consider including verbiage in training invitations that provides clear expectations. For example:

Our session will meet through the Zoom (or Teams, etc....). We will utilize the same rules and norms as in a physical training environment (take notes; participate by asking and answering questions; wear business appropriate clothing). For everyone's benefit, join the course in a quiet place. Video is recommended but not required. Mute your microphone unless you are speaking. Close browser tabs not required for participating in class. This form of learning will be somewhat new to all of us, and success will depend on demonstrating the same commitment we would bring to the physical training room.

Ensure Accessibility

Accommodation Requests: Be sure the following ADA Accommodations verbiage is included on the invitation: If you identify as a person with a disability and would like to request an ADA accommodation to participate, please email (*insert Bureau contact*) or [BHR Training](#) (TTY users can reach us at 503.823.6868) at least 5 business days before the session.

Employees have a range of abilities, and not everyone will disclose a disability: There are likely to be employees in your session with learning or sensory disabilities. They are not required to tell you, and they may not feel comfortable telling *anyone*. Rather than asking them to identify themselves to you, provide options that reach a wide variety of learners.

Provide proactive access: Do your best to provide as much access in advance as possible. If you send images or graphics to your participants, include image descriptions. If you show a video, ensure that subtitles or captions

are included. Remind participants to type questions or comments in the Chat function during a live presentation. Consider assigning a Chat monitor to read questions aloud.

Select accessible resources: It is recommended to use more accessible videoconferencing platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. If providing live audio description, subtitles, or captions for a videoconference meeting, work with a qualified/certified third-party vendor to do so. The City maintains a [list of vendors](#) that provide accessibility-related services. (Note: Not all vendors in the Portland metro area are listed; it's possible to work with a vendor not included on the list.)

Some participants need additional processing time: Don't expect everyone to understand after being told once. Provide agendas and chat logs for later review. When you show images or websites or videos, provide those files for participants to download later.

Be an advocate: If a participant does self-identify as needing assistance, help them find it. Start with [BHR Training](#) or your Bureau's [Human Resources Business Partner](#) (HRBP).

Interaction and Engagement

Having participants listen to a session attentively on a small screen can be challenging. Take advantage of these various methods to keep your audience engaged; most are available on Zoom, and some are available on Teams.

Encourage community: Consider asking (but not requiring) participants to turn on their video, since it is easier to engage with the class if you can see them and participants are more likely to pay attention if they know they're on camera. Keep in mind some participants don't have enough bandwidth at home to do so, or may be anxious about being on camera, which isn't conducive to a comfortable learning environment.

Keep your participants in front of you: Both Zoom and Teams lets you see thumbnails of participants.

Reading the room: Unmuted participants can inadvertently start talking at the same time, you will not be able to read body language easily, and those less inclined to speak may disappear more easily. To address these issues, be more intentional about pausing and asking if anyone else has more thoughts before jumping to the next topic. Consider beginning the session with participants automatically muted to avoid distracting discussions and background noise at the beginning of the session.

Ask participants to mute themselves when not speaking: Alternately, you can ask permission to mute everyone remotely and unmute users when they have a question.

Break up your presentation slides: Be aware that online, perhaps even more than in the training room, participants will read first and listen second. Consider using PowerPoint "animation" to avoid showing all the information on the screen at once.

Invite and respond to questions: If your training session is a large group format with Q&A, invite participants to ask their questions in [Chat](#). To help you avoid having to browse through all the questions in Chat in real time, be sure to assign a co-facilitator to help you by picking a few questions (or all) for you to answer at the appropriate moments or periodically.

Warm and cold calls: You can "cold call" a participant just as you would in the traditional training room instead of waiting for them to raise their hand. For "warm calls," you can message them privately in [Chat](#) before you call on them.

Role plays/case study discussions: You can ask two participants to “role play” a situation like you would in the physical training room or introduce a case study and encourage pair discussions.

Raising hands: This feature works the same as in the physical training room. Have participants use the [Raise Hand](#) feature in Zoom to answer questions. When you open a conversation to participants, be sure to pause a beat to let other people raise their hands. This is another area where a chat monitor would be helpful.

Polls (private or public): With Zoom’s [polling](#) features, get group results in real time, then reveal them later.

Stretch times: Consider inviting participants to “stretch” every 20-30 minutes for 30 seconds. It can be harder to focus attention on a screen than in a training room.

Personal touch: Include a chat question or photo share segment with a theme (e.g., introduce pets, share a picture of your workspace, garden, or yard) as an icebreaker or to wrap up your session.

Breakout groups: If you want participants to reflect in smaller groups, consider using Slack or another chat platform that complements Zoom. You can also use Zoom’s [Breakout Rooms](#) functionality.

Writing on the board: If you usually do “board work” as part of a training, you have [a number of options](#).

Collaborative problem solving and brainstorming: Take digital notes using the [Whiteboards](#) feature in Zoom or the Notes feature in Teams. Allow others in the session to write on the same board to share ideas and problem-solving methods. A tablet is useful for handwriting.

Discussion Boards/Check-in Chat Sessions

Topic-driven: This type of discussion board works especially well for highlighting topics, discussing case studies, or helping your participants focus on key parts of your course content. Provide specific conversation points and prompts that may relate to a topic or a session. Make sure to build in space for reflection or discussion in your discussion prompts.

Social-driven: This type of discussion board works especially well if you want your participants to connect the training with current events or their own projects or work. Your discussion board or chat serves as a digital “water cooler,” and provides an opportunity for networking to your class. Your discussion prompts can be more general, such as asking them to post about the specific topic of the week.

Considerations for Virtual Training

- Be sure to request your courses to be loaded into CityLearner at least one week before your session to ensure your attendees receive credit.
- For training that will be held in Zoom or Teams, the roster will be sent to the requestor two business days before the session so they can send the Teams or Zoom meeting link to registered attendees.
- Rosters will be sent two business days before the class date.
- Feel free to contact [BHR Training](#) for assistance!



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