

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Regardless of the delivery method(s) used, effective online professional learning offerings:¹



Motivate and Sustain Participant Engagement



Create Opportunities for Participants to Collaborate



Enable Participants to Reflect on Content and Practice

DELIVERY MODELS²



SYNCHRONOUS

All participants engage in professional learning at the same time.



Synchronous approaches do not necessarily use technology to *transform* the professional learning experience. Instead, synchronous approaches often resemble in-person professional learning opportunities, delivered in a virtual environment. The extent to which the facilitator and/or participants interact during synchronous professional learning differs depending on the format, ranging from questions posted to a chat box during a live webinar to a collaborative discussion among team members throughout a live videoconference.³

Examples: ● Live Webinar ● Live Videoconference ● Virtual Classroom ● Virtual Coaching/Mentoring



Permits live interaction among participants (e.g., group activities).



Enables participants to get immediate feedback and answers to questions.



Allows the facilitator to gauge participant learning and reinforce certain concepts in “real time.”



Requires participants to adhere to a given training schedule.



Offers less individual choice with respect to content.



Feels less personalized (e.g., pace suits slower, less skilled learners).



ASYNCHRONOUS

Participants engage in professional learning at different times.



Asynchronous approaches typically enable participants to self-direct their professional learning, choosing which opportunities to pursue and when. Such personalization means that professional learning experiences may differ across participants, based on their needs and preferences. In the context of asynchronous approaches, technology generally *does* transform the professional learning experience. Participants may not only use new platforms and apps, but also connect with—and learn from—peers outside their district.⁴

Examples: ● Recorded Module ● Resource Repository ● Discussion Board ● Learning Community



Enables participants to select offerings suited to their needs.



Permits participants to access content when convenient.



Allows participants to proceed at their own pace (e.g., can review certain content, pause for reflection).



Reduces or delays contact between the facilitator and participants, as well among participants.



Delays feedback and answers to participant questions



Requires self-motivation and discipline since participants pace their own learning.

SELECTION CRITERIA⁵



To select the most appropriate delivery model for online professional development offerings, consider the participants' learning objectives and preferences:⁶

- **Do participants need to:** fulfill specific requirements (e.g. for certification or compliance), collaborate and exchange ideas, access additional information or resources on a topic, etc.?
- **Do participants tend to learn more from:** structured experiences with formal learning goals or self-directed experiences completed over time?



TIP:

Consider a Hybrid Approach



Online professional learning offerings can **combine synchronous and asynchronous elements**. Prior to a live webinar, for example, the facilitator may ask the participants to review a set of materials available to download online. Afterwards, the facilitator may create a discussion board to enable the participants to ask questions, discuss the content, and share ideas.



Consider a Synchronous Model When⁷...

- ☐ Participants are located in the same geographical area.
- ☐ Participants must complete the training at a specific time or on a tight timeline.
- ☐ Participants possess similar prior knowledge and skills.
- ☐ Participants pursue similar learning objectives.
- ☐ Participants need to learn content based on evaluation and/or shared experiences.



TIP



Record live webinars to enable viewing by participants who could not attend.



Consider an Asynchronous Model When...

- ☐ Participants are widely dispersed.
- ☐ Participants face scheduling constraints or can complete training on a more flexible timeline.
- ☐ Participants' prior knowledge and skills vary.
- ☐ Participants pursue different learning objectives.
- ☐ Training content seems unlikely to change and involves a transfer of consistent information.
- ☐ Participants can use well-defined problems or examples to build comprehension.



TIP



Create opportunities for participants to ask questions and interact with colleagues.



Consider a Hybrid Model When...

- ☐ Participants are widely dispersed.
- ☐ Participants need to learn content based on less-structured topics that require application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.



TIP



Consider creating synchronous elements such as interactive online whiteboards and instant messaging and asynchronous elements like discussion boards and email distribution lists.



Click [here](#) and [here](#) for more information on considerations for various delivery models.

STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES⁸



LIVE WEBINAR⁹

- **Create a facilitator guide:** Such a resource helps the person who developed the presentation remember crucial points and enables other staff to deliver similar webinars more easily.
- **Limit the length:** Consider scheduling several shorter webinars instead of a single session if the volume and complexity of the content and/or the time required to deliver it risk losing participants' attention.
- **Design slides wisely:** To avoid overwhelming participants, only add key content to the presentation, including other important information in a participant guide. Use graphics and visuals to communicate content where possible.
- **Incorporate group activities:** Group activities keep participants engaged and allow them to interact and collaborate with colleagues. For example, pair staff who quickly grasp new content with less comfortable colleagues to provide impromptu coaching/mentoring.
- **Ask questions:** Questions not only help to hold participants' attention, but also enable the facilitator to gauge their understanding. Also consider live polls and/or quizzes.



Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more tips.



PRE-RECORDED MODULE¹⁰

- **Select appropriate content:** Ensure the content suits an independent learning format.
- **Limit the length:** Target a duration of 30-45 minutes for each module. After approximately 45 minutes, many participants may become bored or get distracted.
- **Use a lesson plan format:** Clearly state the learning objectives and begin with a focus activity or anticipatory set to build interest. Maximize understanding and retention by presenting the most important content first. Then, include independent and guided learning activities to keep participants engaged, as well as formative assessments to gauge participants' learning, throughout the module. Embed a culminating activity or summative assessment at the end, requiring participants to demonstrate understanding of the material.
- **Offer resources and supports:** Share links to additional information on the topic. Enable participants to submit questions about the content. Provide technical support for participants who encounter difficulties.
- **Facilitate interaction:** Create a discussion board to encourage participants to exchange ideas.



Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more tips.



ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY¹¹

- **Identify participants:** Consider involving a diverse group of staff to facilitate meaningful exchanges of ideas. Diversity may mean staff in different roles, staff with different levels of expertise, and/or staff with different perspectives on a topic.
- **Specify a purpose:** With participants' input, develop a clear set of objectives for the community's collaborative learning.
- **Provide strong leadership:** Have an experienced facilitator moderate community activities to keep the environment focused on learning and knowledge-sharing.
- **Engage in a variety of activities:** Foster relationships. Encourage collaboration. Promote self-reflection.
- **Provide appropriate technological resources and supports:** Determine how participants will interact (e.g., discussion boards, instant messaging, email distribution lists). Note any other technology requirements (e.g., file-sharing capabilities). Deliver related training as needed, make reference manuals available, and offer technical support when participants experience problems.



Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more tips.



ONLINE RESOURCE REPOSITORY¹²

- **Create a landing page:** Develop a site on which participants can access relevant resources on one or more topics.
- **Look locally first:** Seek appropriate resources recommended and/or used by the district or the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. In addition to saving time, such a step helps ensure the resources align with district and state practices and meet various quality criteria.
- **Consider the source:** When searching for resources outside the district or state, research the background of the author(s) and/or publisher.
- **Review the content:** Before sharing with colleagues, vet material for validity, reliability, and credibility. For example, click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for guidance on how to find and evaluate open educational resources.
- **Pose questions:** When asking participants to read a particular resource to support professional development, include a list of questions. Such questions may not only guide participants' reading, but also provide a structure for any discussions a facilitator plans to lead.



Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more tips.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION

 Evaluations of online professional development offerings should assess:¹³

Implementation

Did professional development occur as planned?

Perceptions

How did participants perceive the professional development?

Outcomes

Did professional development achieve the intended goals?

For example, as participants complete online professional development offerings, consider having them complete an exit survey in order to understand:¹⁴

Participant Characteristics

Facilitator Efforts

Participant Reactions

Future Training Needs

Impact on Participants

 Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more information on how to evaluate online professional development.

ENDNOTES

¹⁴Emerging Design Principles for Online and Blended Teacher Professional Development in K-12 STEM." Community for Advancing Discovery Research in Education, 2017. <https://cadrek12.org/resources/emerging-design-principles-online-and-blended-teacher-professional-development-k-12-stem>

²[1] Lawless, C. "Synchronous vs Asynchronous Learning: Which is Right for Your Learners?" LearnUpon, April 23, 2020, <https://www.learnupon.com/blog/synchronous-learning-asynchronous-learning/> [2] Slatinsky, D. "Synchronous or Asynchronous? How to Pick Your Training Delivery Method." Learning Solutions, June 26, 2013, <https://learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/1197/synchronous-or-asynchronous-how-to-pick-your-training-delivery-method> [3] Bates, M., L. Phalen, and C. Moran. "Online Professional Development: A Primer." *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2016, <https://kappanonline.org/online-professional-development-primer-bates-phalen-moran/> [4] "Synchronous or Asynchronous Delivery?" Algonquin College. <https://www.algonquincollege.com/its/synchronous-or-asynchronous-delivery/>

³Description adapted from: Bates, Phalen, and Moran, Op. cit.

⁴Ibid.

⁵[1] Lawless, Op. cit. [2] Slatinsky, Op. cit. [3] Bates, Phalen, and Moran, Op. cit. [4] Silberman, M. *Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples and Tips*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2006. pp. 191-205.

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⁶Description adapted from: Bates, Phalen, and Moran, Op. cit.

⁷Selection criteria adapted from: Silberman, Op. cit.

⁸[1] Little, C. and B. Housand. "Avenues to Professional Learning Online: Technology Tips and Tools for Professional Development in Gifted Education." *Gifted Child Today*, 34:4, 2011. Accessed via SAGE Journals. [2] Elliott, J. "The Evolution from Traditional to Online Professional Development: A Review." *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 33:3, 2017. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317142426_The_Evolution_From_Traditional_to_Online_Professional_Development_A_Review [3] Kleiman, G. et al. "Designing and Implementing Online Professional Development Workshops." EDC Center for Online Professional Education, 2000. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.459.1870&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁹Bullet points adapted from: 1] Silberman, Op. cit. [2] Slatinsky, Op. cit.

¹⁰Bullet points adapted from: 1] Silberman, Op. cit. [2] Slatinsky, Op. cit. [3] Sanders, E. and L. Myers. "Designing Online Professional Development Modules for Faculty and Staff." Tech Talk Live Blog. <https://techtalklive.org/ttlblog/designing-online-professional-development-for-faculty-and-staff/>

¹¹Bullet points adapted from: Edmondson, S. "10 Things that Make Online Professional Learning Communities Effective." IRIS Connect, November 14, 2016. <https://blog.irisconnect.com/us/community/blog/10-things-that-make-online-professional-learning-communities-effective> See also: 1] Elliott, Op. cit. [2] Little and Housand, Op. cit. [3] Kleiman et al., Op. cit. [4] Blitz, C. "Can Online Learning Communities Achieve the Goals of Traditional Professional Learning Communities? What the Literature Says." U.S. Department of Education, September 2013. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED544210.pdf> [5] "Exploratory Research on Designing Online Communities of Practice for Educators to Create Value." U.S. Department of Education, April 2014. <https://tech.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Exploratory-Research-on-Designing-Online-Communities-FINAL.pdf>

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¹³Haslam, M. "Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide." National Staff Development Council, 2010. <https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/teacher-professional-development-evaluation-guide.pdf>

¹⁴Taylor-Powell, E. and M. Renner. "Collecting Evaluation Data: End-of-Session Questionnaires." University of Wisconsin - Extension, 2009. http://www.cefe.illinois.edu/tools/Evaluation%20Training%20Resources/UW%20Extension%20Collecting%20Evaluation%20Data_1108.pdf