ALN Online Event Planning: Top Tips & Advice

Preparation: ICT

- **Platform Requirements**: Check if a smartphone or tablet is suitable for the platform you are using, and if there are any browser or operating system limitations for those using computers. You may want to share the help page links for the platform with participants before the event.
- **Joining Instructions:** Make sure your joining instructions are clear and straightforward. It may be helpful to get them sense-checked by someone else to improve their clarity.
- **Participants' Skills**: Don't make assumptions about anyone's skills or knowledge; unless you know otherwise, assume everyone is a novice so you don't leave out any important information.
- **Guidance & Help**: Depending on the platform you are using, it may be helpful to share a short video on how to use the platform (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc). You do not have to create one, as there are many examples freely available on YouTube to which you can direct people.
- **Participants' Technology**: Send a message to all participants about the basic level of tech required, such as use of a microphone and/or video camera for group work or discussions; and think about making a recommendation on which browser and version to use. Ensure participants organise their own technology before the event and stress that facilitators cannot be responsible for checking technology set-up during the event.
- **Testing**: Set time aside ahead of the event to test tech with anyone presenting remotely, to avoid any complications on the day. Ask presenters to provide you with a copy of their slides which you can share on their behalf if they encounter technical difficulties during their presentation. If possible, also set time aside a week beforehand for participants to test their set-up, and possibly tour the functions within your chosen platforms as a pre-event activity.
- **Bandwidth:** If possible, limit the online activities (streaming, gaming or the uploading of large documents) of others in your household during the time you are hosting your event as this could result in the loss of connectivity which could substantially affect your event (see also the point on Co-Hosting below).

Preparation: Meeting / Event Format

- **Number of Participants:** The group size should be manageable to ensure you can maintain their involvement and interest. It may be helpful to suggest a maximum of 30 online participants to enable you to enforce meeting etiquette (e.g. mic muting).
- **Duration**: Consider the duration of your event; an hour is a good length of time for talking over slides and some interaction via online chat or a poll.
- **Scheduling & Breaks**: If your event will last more than an hour, schedule breaks and ensure you keep on top of the agenda and timings. Build in time for a changeover of speaker and for people to take comfort breaks; during these times it is useful if the host facilitator fills any breaks by explaining what is going on or updating on the progress of the event.
- **Content**: As with any event or meeting, be prepared to cover less than you think you will; it is better to prioritise your key messages and limit your content than run over and lose participant engagement.
- **Engagement**: Think about how to make the learning active, whilst keeping everything as straightforward as possible. Consider using simple interactive activities such as a Padlet, other collaborative documents or polling software. Even a shared Google Drive document can help enable

participatory activity. In more advanced sessions, you could make use of breakout rooms to allow participants to work together in small groups.

On the Day

- **Welcome Slide**: Create an opening slide which sets the scene for your event (for example, the use of online Chat, mics muted, hands-up and thumbs up buttons) and also shows the plan for the session. This could also be emailed to all participants prior to the event to remind them of the imminent start and to frame the discussions.
- **Checks:** Before the event starts properly, ensure participants can see and hear everything, possibly making use of the hands-up and thumbs-up functions.
- **Muting**: Participants should be encouraged keep their microphones muted during presentations and to use the Chat facility for any questions they have during the presentation. The facilitator can then use these comments to open up discussions, and microphones could be turned back on for verbal questions then too.
- **Gallery View**: If using Teams / Zoom or similar, suggest choosing 'Gallery view' if possible so that that all participants can be seen on screen. However, the availability of this function may be dependent on numbers in attendance or participants' technology.
- **Co-Hosting**: If possible, co-deliver with one other person so that one of you can facilitate and the other can monitor Chat. This is especially useful for larger meetings, and for sessions with over 30 participants, and to cover any unforeseen technical eventualities. Consider an alternative way of communicating with your co-host in case you lose contact with the event, eg swap mobile numbers.
- **Keeping to Time**: Be ready to give speakers time warnings so that they stick to their timeslot. Similarly, ensure you draw discussions to a close in a timely manner.
- **Recording Sessions**: Record your session if possible to share more widely with those who couldn't attend and as a reminder for those who did. However, ensure you seek permission from any speakers and any participants before sharing, ideally before the event starts. Consider whether recording discussions would stifle open conversations and possibly only record the presentations.
- **Video Abstracts**: As an alternative, you could ask presenters to share a brief (three minute?) video abstract of their talk, with the key points. This can be easily shared, with permission, on a platform like YouTube to provide a taste of the session.
- **Feedback**: Consider ways of gathering feedback from the event, using an online form - speak to the ALN Operations Officer for any assistance.
- Don't worry if it's not perfect! Participants will appreciate your efforts, and hopefully come away with some valuable insights, information and knowledge.

This document was developed in liaison with members of ALN and the Development Officer at the Mercian Collaboration, and is intended to provide some assistance around the preparation needed to organise an online workshop or meeting. If you have any suggestions for additional tips, please send them to academiclibrariesnorth@sconul.ac.uk.