LEARNING EVENT GUIDE #1

HOW TO DESIGN A GREAT LEARNING EVENT

Running an effective learning event isn't just about engaging people at the event and making it enjoyable, it is also about getting messages across that people can learn from and act upon in their own work. Running a great learning event means consciously designing the event as a learning experience for the participants, as well as focussing on the content to share.

Spring Consortium have run and attended many events as part of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. Many Local Authorities and voluntary sector organisations also have a great deal of experience in running learning events. This guide contains tips from the Spring Consortium about what we have learned makes events work. This guide is intended to help anyone running an innovation project of any kind to share what they do with others.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Be clear about your purpose
- Design the session for learning
- Give space to different voices

BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE

Have a clear purpose in mind

Why are you holding the event? What are the objectives, and how will you know if you have achieved them? What do you want your participants to know about your work, and what do you want them to do next?

Think about outputs

Do you want to produce any outputs in response to the event, or at the event? This could be a blog, some tweets, or a pamphlet about the innovation including insights from discussions held, a toolkit, 'how to' guide or other useful product that is co-created at the session. Nominate someone to capture what is needed to produce any outputs, provide participants with plenty of materials to note down their thoughts and ensure you get hold of what you need (taking photos of flipchart working sheets is a good idea). Plan in time for the content to be generated.

Decide on your key messages

What are the headline pieces of information you want attendees to take away? What will be critical for them know in order to shape their own work, or do things differently? Think of different ways to get the message across. For example, if one of your messages is that service user involvement is key, then involve some service users in your event. If it is that it is important to empower social workers, then demonstrate that by having social workers run some sessions.

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DESIGN THE SESSION FOR LEARNING

Think about sequencing

The order your speakers and activities are scheduled can affect the way people experience the day.

- Who is going to 'host' the event, who will set the agenda or frame the debate?
- At a face to face event, who will energise everyone after lunch, and how?
- How do you want to close the event so that people leave feeling excited, committed and ready to act on what they have learned?
- When should the hard work of learning in breakouts happen, and what are the essential inputs that are needed before then?
- Use warm up activities to get people talking, sharing, and ready to work together.
- At the end of the day, invite people to commit to action by asking them to write down their next steps, pledge an action to the room, or share what they will do next with their neighbour.

GIVE SPACE TO DIFFERENT VOICES

People respond well to service users and front-line professionals talking about their experiences of new approaches.

- Where possible give a platform to families, young people or other service-users to tell their stories.
- Try to make these contributions as authentic as possible, so that service users are able to talk about what really matters to them. They may need support to make their contribution (e.g. an interview format), and may prefer to be filmed in advance, with the video shown on the day.
- Where different professionals and agencies are involved, give a range of them a chance to talk about the work from their point of view – especially where they are not from the lead organisation.
- Consider inviting service-users and practitioners as event participants as well.

CHOOSE YOUR FORMAT

Depending on the purpose of your event, you might want to run a face to face event, or consider a webinar.

Face to face events are great for:

Networking and relationship building

People who are interested enough to make a serious commitment of time

Delving deeper into the topic, and doing real work together

Webinars are great for:

Reaching a wider audience, including those not yet sure enough to invest time in attending an event

Creating a 'record' of a presentation or conversation for people to watch, re watch, and share with a wider audience at a later date

More regular, low cost, opportunities for giving input to networks or teams already involved in implementation

LEARNING EVENT GUIDE #2

RUNNING A GREAT FACE TO FACE LEARNING EVENT

BASIC LOGISTICS

- Schedule the event for a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday as attendance is usually lower on Mondays and Fridays.

- Start on or after 10am and finish on or before 4pm, if people are travelling long distances – and stick to your time frame (best not to finish earlier as many people book travel around the advertised schedule).

- Think about catering, tea and coffee, lunch if it is an all-day event. Make sure water is readily available and tell people in advance if lunch is included, or not.

- Plan the technology you will need and test it all beforehand.

- If a big event, consider inviting three times the number of people you want to come, and overbook places by 10% to account for last minute drop outs.

- Name badges with job titles can help people get to know one another quickly.

THINK ABOUT THE SPACE AND LAYOUT

1 - Cabaret style tables are better than lecture style chairs in rows – it means people can talk on tables, come up with joint questions, and get to know one another. You can also run workshops or breakout sessions in the same space as the main speakers, but do think about noise levels.

2 - Make sure there are walls, boards, windows or pillars that people can stick working flipcharts or other sheets to. A good event design can be undermined by the lack of space to present and share ideas.

3 - Try to book a bigger space than you think you need so that there is room for people to move around, talk to different people, and work together in flexible ways.

4 - Choose space that is good to work in – lecture halls are good for dissemination and listening, but less good for group work and learning together. Consider venues with lots of breakout spaces or quiet corners. Working on tables in one big room can work really well, but think about the acoustics, temperature control, lighting and room to move around. Think about accessibility, access to facilities, natural light and access to fresh air.

5 - The little things count – make it easy for people to work collaboratively together. Provide suitable pens, post-it notes and paper.

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OFFER A RANGE OF TYPES OF ACTIVITY

In addition to information giving and discussion, consider including activities that require people to work together on their own solutions, to get them thinking about how they would approach similar work in their own contexts.

Inputs and information giving – all events will need some of this, but many events end up doing little else. It is usually best to keep the 'stand and tell' elements short and to the point. Written materials and time to review them can be useful, especially if there is a lot of information to absorb. Provide time for people to share what they have read with the person next to them. Consider giving people material to read before they arrive, or to take away with them afterwards. Review and quality assure any PowerPoint slides from contributors, ensuring they are concise. Make it clear if handouts of slides will be provided.

Discussion and debate – Q&A sessions and panels can work well but need to be planned and managed. Consider asking tables to come up with three questions each, and get a facilitator to identify the themes and ask the speaker or panel to respond. Encourage debate between participants even when this can't be opened to the whole group. Give people good prompts and questions to respond to. You may want to consider identifying, in advance, a known attendee with an important view you would like to be shared with the group, and don't be afraid to ask them to comment to shape the conversation and mood.

Break out activities and co-creation – break-out sessions that include presentations can often become mini-lectures, just to a smaller group. Consider not using slides for smaller sessions and minimise the speaker time (people will almost always go over their allotted time so allow some contingency in the schedule). Give people clear briefs and questions they must address. Give the group a task – to come up with a new idea, five insights about the work, barriers and challenges to implementation. Provide materials they can use to capture their ideas.

Plan some unplanned time – make sure there are opportunities in the day for networking and informal discussion. This can be at registration, lunchtime or after the event, and can also be provided by plenty of time given to breakout sessions that bleed into lunchtime or coffee breaks. People learn as much from their peers as from the formal inputs.

YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER

Working with a professional facilitator to run the day and support the design

Ensuring one person has the task of hosting or being 'master of ceremonies' for the event – they can help to manage the flow, and suggest that people move around, work with people they don't know so well, etc

Planning who sits where, and with whom – do you want people to sit together with people they work with, or mixed up with people from other places?

RUNNING A GREAT LEARNING WEBINAR

THE BASICS

- Webinars enable you to present to many people by broadcasting slides, audio, and/or video. Webinars are hosted on a webinar platform and the contributors will need a laptop to present from and access to the webinar platform. Presenters can structure their webinars in various ways, from presenting slides and other content, to broadcasting a video of themselves.

- The audience connects to the webinar through a link that can be sent via email, and no special software or equipment is needed, apart from headphones or speakers on their computer and internet access.

- There are several providers of webinar platforms and services available, at low cost that can be found online. Examples are provided on the next page.

- For an example of a webinar that we've created, visit the Spring Consortium website and look for the Complex Safeguarding Webinar which you can watch at your leisure.

- The following pages provide some top tips on running a webinar effectively. These are a collection of all the things that can help deliver a successful webinar, however feel free to tailor them to your individual needs and resources.

LOGISTICS

Think carefully about the **length of the webinar** – one hour is a good length to aim for to ensure you have enough time to cover your key messages whilst keeping your viewers engaged.

Time of the day can also have an impact – avoid times when your audience will be most busy, lunch time often works well.

Consider having all the **speakers in the same room** – this allows you to communicate with each other much more easily, allowing you to resolve any problems that may arise and appear seamless from the audience's perspective.

Walk through the technology with the presenters – allowing presenters early access to the platform can help familiarise them with the technology and resolve any IT issues that may arise.

A trial run through of the full presentation can give you valuable insight into the perspective of the audience and allow you to tweak the structure and slides to ensure it flows smoothly on the day.

Facilitators are key – it can help to have more than one facilitator to support the speakers, this will allow the speakers to concentrate fully on their content. We have found the following roles are useful when running a webinar:

- Host: to introduce the topic and speakers and to facilitate the discussion.
- Question & answers facilitator: to receive, review and respond to questions from the audience and pass on any relevant questions for the speaker to answer. Most platforms enable the audience to submit questions online during the webinar.
- Technology facilitator: to ensure the smooth running of the technology platform and to control the slides, they can also keep track of timings to ensure you run to plan.

A script of the webinar can help keep you moving – laying out the key points and the order can be helpful for your speakers to keep them on track and aware of what's coming up next.

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DESIGNING YOUR CONTENT

Have a clear purpose in mind

Why are you holding a webinar? What are the objectives of the session and how will you know you have achieved them? What do you want your audience to know about your work and what do you want them to do next?

Think of some key messages

What are the headlines you want your audience to be thinking about? Use these to shape your webinar to ensure you are effectively communicating your key points in a concise way.

Think about your audience

It can be easy to forget about an audience you can't see. How can you keep them engaged for the full session? Consider making it interactive, ask the audience to respond to a poll or send in questions. Having more than one speaker can help prevent the session becoming monotonous and having multiple speakers 'in conversation' can help keep your audience's interest.

ON THE DAY

- Take the time to set up early to ensure the technology runs to plan.

- Have the speakers in the same room – if that's unrealistic ensure each speaker has a facilitator to assist with the technology platform and to communicate with the other facilitators and speakers.

- Hand signals are useful to communicate with each other during the session - agree what these are and what they represent before the session, they can be used to indicate a speaker is speaking too fast or that you're running out of time.

- Have more than one laptop to stream the webinar – this will allow you to view the webinar as the audience is seeing it and to control the pace of the slides as there can often be a lag between what is being presented and what the audience is seeing.

- Pre-empting questions from the audience before the webinar can be useful to ensure time isn't wasted during the session in coming up with answers.

- Think carefully about how to allow the audience to ask questions – technology platforms often do not allow the audience to verbally participate in any live streams however many do allow the audience to engage with the speakers by typing out their questions. Consider how you can use these to break up the session and keep your audience engaged.

- Remember to ask your audience questions for them to respond to – this can be an effective way to gauge interest and engagement during the session.

CHOOSING YOUR TECHNOLOGY

There are a multitude of offerings available for hosting a webinar. The following comparison site shows some of the popular webinar providers https://www.capterra.com/webinar-software. The platforms themselves often allow free trials for you to test how well they work. The provider will give simple instructions for how to set the webinar up. Some thoughts on questions you should consider when choosing a platform:

Base requirements – think about what your base requirements are and keep it simple. Does the platform do what you want it to do? Does it allow you to stream live? How many participants and speakers can it support? Can your audience engage with you? Can you record the stream and put it on an website for sharing at a later date?
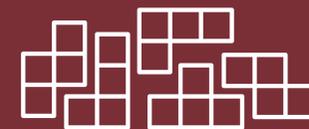
Ease of use – an easy to use platform can save you time and frustration. Think about the level of support provided with the platform. Are the instructions easy to understand? Do you need to be trained to use it? Can you familiarise yourself with the platform before your session?