

FSLN Coffee Chat: How to make online convenings productive, impactful, & effective November 18, 2020

Join this FSLN Coffee chat to hear how others are experimenting with ways to create online events that are engaging and valuable for participants. Rachael Reichenbach and Sera Deva will share how they have taken conferences, trainings and workgroup meetings online, and what they've learned in the process.

Rachael is a freelance facilitator based in Alabama who has spent much of her quarantine time supporting food systems organizations and networks in the South to redesign in-person convenings and trainings for the virtual realm.

Sera Deva is the Director of Programs & Systems Design at Organic Growers School, and has been working to transition 40+ annual in-person events (from farm tours to a 2000 person conference) online.

Call Notes:

- How do you facilitate engagement? How do you facilitate connection and networking?
 - How to support people to stay engaged when they aren't speaking
 - How to facilitate connection and networking when people do have the opportunity to speak
- Biggest thing: consider the format of your event. Successfully switching to online programming requires a complete revisioning of the format of once in-person events. Change day-long or multi-day long events to months of co-hort meetings. A longer, more regular connection with the same folks builds community in a way you just can't get with one-time meetings.
- Good AV is essential. If you don't have good audio, or the host's video continues to go out, you'll have participants drop off.
- Start with an ice breaker! Encourage people to engage in the chat box as soon as you can.
- The most important: Provide meaningful content that is relevant, interesting, concise and timely. Example: Cherokee Foods Harvest Conference workshop.
- Breakout rooms with a limited number of folks are essential for networking. Consider keeping the same breakout rooms throughout the event so the same folks are coming back to each other.
 - Theme breakout rooms -- have folks rename themselves with a number, which will automatically organize themselves in a way that it's easy for the facilitator to group people by topic they're interested in.
 - Make drive documents for people to use/take notes into during breakout room sessions, if you can't assign a facilitator. Clean up and share these notes and documents with participants afterwards.
 - Followup tasks? Buddy people up so they have an accountability partner.
- Be clear you're happy for people to participate in whatever way they feel comfortable; give them options (chat, unmute, raise hand, reactions, whatever is applicable to your event). DO NOT pressure people to participate in a specific way.

- You need a [zoom tech host](#) - one person who is dedicated to ensuring that the virtual environment works smoothly and sets participants up for a good experience
 - A secondary person who is focused on technology, so host can stay focused on their task
- Engagement - how to keep people's attention and focus, create a sense that they are participating
 - Unofficial Welcome -- have a welcome slide as people come through the "door" - having a question or prompt for folks to answer in the chatbox is helpful to get conversation started
 - Chat Guidelines - how do you want folks to utilize the chat?
 - Tech Requests/Group Norms Around Technology (videos on, typing in the chat if you are stepping away for a moment, etc)
 - Using sli.do up-vote for aligning around conversation topics
 - Presenting content in a way that is engaging - quality slides, short chunks of information, time for reflection and questions
 - Solo journaling and reflection - give people time to think before asking them to share with the group - people can either come off mute to share, drop their thoughts in the chat or a shared google doc, or you could do a chat waterfall
 - If you have a question that you're asking people to respond to, having a few minutes for folks to reflect on this is helpful
 - Minimize the amount of time that people are passively listening to content delivery
- Connection and Networking
 - Connection before content - always make time for a check-in of some kind
 - People are more likely to speak if they have already spoken - breaking people out into pairs or groups of three's or four's before asking for full group participation increases the odds that folks will speak up
 - Be mindful of the size of the group for a check-in - if you have an hour-long meeting and let everyone go around to check-in all together, you will run out of time
 - If you have a juicy check-in question, it might take up the whole conversation and you won't
 - Set people up for success inside of breakout rooms - thinking about how many people, how much time, the prompt/question for discussion, is there a shared google doc for note taking
 - Using "I pass to...." during popcorn-style sharing to keep things moving (fun twist - pass to the person who you think is most geographically close to you)
- Other ideas
 - Using polls are a good break from the norm
 - Using the "whiteboard" function - people can respond to a question and whiteboard
 - Have people who are "seeded" and can fill in the silence
 - Send prep materials and questions in advance to prepare participants
- Welcoming people by name -- do you recommend greeting people by name if you don't know everyone's name?
 - Seems like this one was mixed -- some people think if you welcome one person, you should welcome all people; others are okay with not being explicitly

welcomed; some think its ok to call out a few people and have a blanket welcome, esp in larger groups

- How do we engage participants on the verge of Zoom burnout?
 - Acknowledge it! Lowering our expectations and trying to achieve less might be one way to frame this
 - Considerations around lengthening or shortening times -- does this need a meeting? Can it be covered in a meeting? When can an online engagement be eliminated? VS. squeezing a big strategy session into a limited amount of time isn't a good use of time either
 - Build in breaks to your calls, finding ways to move
 - Make a schedule, advertise that schedule, stick to that schedule
 - Play music during breaks and welcome
 - Strong facilitation is important, especially if there are breaks
- How do we make our online events accessible (to people who aren't familiar with Zoom, other accessibility issues)?
 - Don't assume people are familiar with the platform
 - Do a mini-tutorial in the beginning, acknowledge that it might be tiring for folks who have heard it a lot, orient people to the chatbox, consider using closed captioning
 - YouTube has the option to assign closed captioning to videos - this is free!
 - REV.com is also a closed captioning platform
 - Offering ASL, building budget for this
 - Asking people "what type of accessibility accommodations do you require to fully participate in this session?"
 - Have people rename themselves with their pronouns
 - Consider group norms that are standardized across the organization
 - Allow folks to access recording
 - Consider different learning styles - sharing notes, videos, and audio recordings
 - Virtual helpdesk
 - Will have a graphic across all sites that takes them to a google form that offers 1:1 support
 - Day before conference offering a Zoom tutorial to familiarize registrants
 - Offering the option for folks to have a zoom tech buddy
 - Speed networking & expo
 - Can talk to one person on a panel - multiple zoom rooms that you could just go into. Replicating running into someone at a conference and having a 1:1 conversation
- What free/cheap tools are available for online events?
 - See what platforms others are using and add your favorites [here!](#)
 - Mentimeter and slido - polls
 - Miro and Mural for collaborative spaces

- Affordable online platforms for conferences: there are developers who are developing these quickly, recommends Whova

Q: What resources do you recommend?

- Googleclassroom (free for non-profits)
- GoogleHangouts (for team meetings, when the Zoom line is tied up)
- GoogleDrive and Youtube for things like recording storage and resource sharing, Ticketspice also for recording sharing, storage, etc.
- We're also using Whova, a paid but relatively cheap online conference platform.
- [It Takes Two to Zoom](#)
- [Online Facilitation Tips](#)
- [Mr. and Mrs. Wright](#) - Farmer Story
- [5-Step Self Compassion Hold](#)
- [Virtual Meetings for Clarity and Momentum](#)
- [Playmeo](#)
- [Template Slides for Online Spaces](#)
- [We! Connect Cards](#)
- [Questions to ask instead of 'How are you?'](#)
- [Accessibility Registration Questions](#)
- [How to Have Fun at Work While Staying Productive](#)
- [How to Open a Meeting with an Icebreaker](#)
- [ACS Professional Closed Captioning](#)