



Best Practices for Online Trainings

Context

Ummeed has been delivering online trainings for the last few years now using the Project ECHO format.

In addition, Ummeed has been conducting several face-to-face sensitization workshops, skill-building workshops, and long-term training programs over the last several years (first program delivered in 2004-05).

The COVID-19 lockdown that started in the latter half of March 2020 forced many organizations to rapidly adapt and innovate. For Ummeed, a big part of the adaptation was converting several of our sensitization and skill-building workshops to the online format. Our initial hesitation in converting long-term trainings to online has also since been overcome, at least partially. While we realize that there is certain content that will need to continue to be delivered face to face because of the nature of the content (e.g., learning complex therapy skills), we have also learned that there is quite a bit that can be delivered online.

Introduction to this document

While Ummeed has been able to convert several trainings to the online format, there have also been lots of learnings along the way. As Ummeed's diverse team of pediatricians, autism intervention specialists, counsellors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, speech therapists, special educators, and others adapted and innovated, the team also made sure that we were regularly meeting and sharing these learnings with each other.

This document describes some best practices involved in using the online platform for training, and has been created based on these internal group discussions, feedback and learnings.

Format of the subsequent sections

The first section below is about the preparing effectively for an online training.

The second section describes best practices for training delivery (i.e., actual facilitation of the training).

The third section describes some post-training activities that can be undertaken.

The fourth section describes the challenges that might be experienced and some ways in which these can be mitigated.

The last section highlights some reflections from Ummeedians about online trainings.



Preparing for the online training session

Finalizing content

- Contextualize the content to make it relevant to the audience and what they are experiencing now (e.g. mental health concerns, how to maximize the lockdown opportunity to teach new skills, etc.).
- Once the topic is finalized, give thought to what and how much content you'd like to cover under the topic. E.g., for the same topic, content for face-to-face content training and online training may look different because of the difficulty in engaging diverse participants virtually. Thus, one has to keep the content manageable.
- Have as much of the content on the slides as possible. At the same time, ensure the slides are not too wordy.
- Keep the slides engaging – through pictures, quotes, etc.
- Plan on questions/ activities to engage people and get them to participate actively, e.g., creating mocks through videos or sending videos, ted talks etc. in advance to the trainees.
- Consider giving trainees some task, break outs, creative activity to test application.
- Plan your questions, so that you can elicit a discussion/ participation. Also, have a slide with the question as part of your presentation, so that participants can read the question in parallel to hearing it.
- Build in break times if the training is more than 2 hours. Consider sensory breaks –e.g., asking people to get up or do something.
- Allocate more time for the training than would be needed for face-to-face training. For online content, time required for facilitating discussions is longer because more prompts are needed plus disruptions because of internet issues, etc.
- Consider sending your PPT or notes and reading material that may be supportive before the training session where possible.

Defining roles

- The importance of a moderator in every session cannot be under-stated. The moderator *is not* the trainer; he/ she should be a separate person. The role of the moderator is to ensure smooth functioning of the training. E.g., allowing participants to join the session and managing participant difficulties with logging in, etc., solving any technical glitches during the session, supporting activities such as creating breakout sessions, running a poll, keeping a watch on the chat window and sharing key questions with the trainers, ensuring all participants complete the feedback/ evaluations, etc.
- Have at least two trainers in every session. This helps reduce the monotony of the session, increases perspectives that are discussed, and also if one person has connectivity or other issues, the second trainer can step in as back up.
- Amongst the two (or more) trainers, divide roles clearly –e.g., one takes content, one takes Q and A; or if both are covering content, then to be clear about which content will be taken up by who.
- All trainers should be adequately prepared to back each other up, in case of issues such as connectivity etc. mentioned above.



- Ensure all the above members see themselves as part of a team and there is smooth coordination. Consider having a WhatsApp group of the trainers and moderator to communicate with each other if required during the training.

Understanding our participants

- Check in advance with participants if they have any special needs around hearing, visual diversity or any other accommodation they may need. Be prepared to support these requirements.

Planning the delivery

- Try to ensure stable internet connection.
- Have a dry run before the training begins so that every trainer can acquaint themselves to the training process– verify roles, smoothness of flow, check that videos are playing in shared screen, break-out rooms, polls, etc.
- Consider having the evaluations completed about 20 minutes before training completion, since it can be hard to follow up for evaluations later. Build time for evaluation into the training schedule so that the training time doesn't extend beyond the scheduled end time.

Communicating about the training session to the participants

- Send the participants a confirmation email. Include in the mail, the zoom video link and instructions on how to use zoom (similar instructions to be sent out for any other online medium being used for the training).
- Share any preparatory reading material, links, etc. before-hand.

Conducting an online training session

- Trainers and moderators must dress appropriately (as they would for a face-to-face training). They must ensure that their background is clutter-free.
- The person who is managing the slides and other presentation material such as videos, should save them all in a single folder on their desktop and also keep them all open and minimized. This makes it easier to share different kinds of content smoothly during the session. If the content is not kept readily accessible in this way, there can be issues such as the screen freezing when the trainer is navigating folders on his/ her computer.
- Have an introductory slide about Ummeed that participants can see when they log in.
- Set expectations and rules upfront, and also have them on a slide. Reiterate them again during the session as and when needed. Examples of expectations and rules include – keep yourself on mute when not speaking, if possible share your video, share your questions on chat box, etc.
- Show the agenda slide in the beginning so people know what topics to expect. You can keep showing this slide again during the session, highlighting what is covered in a different color. This allows participants to know what is covered already and what remains to be covered in the rest of the session.



- Pause with every slide to give participants time to read what is on the slide. Including speaking about the content on the slide and the pause, expect to spend about 3-4 minutes per slide.
- Videos can freeze or play in chunks based on the internet speed at the trainer and participant's ends. So keep aside time to play the video twice if needed.
- Check frequently with trainees about whether the session is going okay and that they can follow what is being discussed.
- Limit the time spent listening to and responding to each participant during interactive activities and discussions so that all participants stay engaged and more people can share their thoughts/queries/responses.
- Speak slower than the pace you would use in a face to face training, in case there is an internet lag.
- Alternate between trainers/ facilitators to reduce monotony.
- Summarizing every ten minutes or so helps, especially when people drop in and out because of internet issues.
- Use tools such as the white board option on zoom to increase participation, capture the summary of discussions, etc. This can also serve as a take away for participants.

Post-training activities

- Send a follow-up email to all participants thanking them for their participation and sharing any relevant training material or post-reading material.
- Collect post-training feedback. Know that it will be difficult to follow-up for this once the training is over and hence one consideration is to have it completed by the participant during the training session itself, as mentioned above.

Challenges and mitigation

- Some participants may find it difficult to access google forms or polls due to being from remoter areas or having less access to resources such as WiFi. So keep the back-up of simple Word document based feedback forms and collecting feedback on phone.
- Delivery of content such as demonstrations, role-plays etc. can be challenging. In some of our trainings, trainers have used family members to role play and demo-ed activities such as visual schedule in their home setting.
- A key challenge in online trainings is the difficulty in observing body language of participants and responding to it as a trainer. To the extent possible, ask participants to keep video on so that there is opportunity to at least observe facial expressions. As mentioned above, also check in regularly with participants during the course of the session.
- Even with known content, the challenge of conducting the training online can feel daunting and anxiety-provoking. Some of this is due to the need to multi-task, i.e., managing logistics while speaking – reading chat, admitting people, moving slides, writing on board, the unfamiliarity of what the other trainer is thinking or going to say, not being able to see the faces of participants, etc.



Therefore, we reiterate the role of a moderator and of there being more than one trainer for any training.

- Summarizing at frequent intervals is helpful for participants who are experiencing difficulties with connectivity

Some additional reflections

- We are seeing participation from families across the socioeconomic spectrum and from wider geographic locations. Parent participation has increased because of no commute. Participation from professionals has increased because of availability of spare time and also the need to stay and feel connected.
- Technology has been a huge enabler in helping reach larger numbers of participants and from different locations.
- It is worth staying in touch with participants on phone call/ google form again after about 3-4 weeks. This is just to ask them what has stayed with them from the training, did they look at the training material again, was it easy to use it, did they find it useful, etc. This can also be very reassuring to the participant as it helps people stay in touch and feel included. We may also learn about concerns such as not having access to internet or limited number of gadgets at home that have to be used by multiple family members.
- Disable private chats, so that participants cannot send direct comments to others without the knowledge of the training team.
- It is useful to allow participants to send emails to the trainers if there is something confidential that they do not wish to type on a chat that can be viewed by more than one person.
- Face to face training makes it possible to build informal rapport with trainees during breaks, but this is hard in online training. However, the flip side with online training is that there is reduction in distractions.

This is a working document and will continue to be updated regularly.