

### Planning a Webinar: Is a webinar right for you?

When deciding if a webinar is the right option for you to use, in the delivery of online programming, consider the following points:

- Decide whether the webinar format is appropriate for the educational effort being planned. Ask these questions:
  - Can content be presented through a webinar as effectively as or more effectively than through other delivery methods?
  - Does the target audience have access to the technology and the skills necessary to participate in a webinar?
  - Is a webinar more cost effective, in time and/or dollars, than other delivery options?
- Determine whether you have the technological capacity to conduct a webinar. Conducting a webinar requires specific hardware and software.
  - Hardware and facilities can range from a full studio-type setting to a smartphone in the middle of a cornfield.
  - Minimally, webinar presenters need a camera, a microphone and, most important, a good Internet connection.
  - The best practice is to have a hard-wired Ethernet Internet connection, the second-best option is a strong wireless connection, and the least desirable connection is a cell signal through a phone or mobile device. If the webinar will be presented from a field or remote location and no wired connection is possible, a mobile hotspot should be used.
  - Consider the availability and ease of use of the selected webinar platform for the proposed host, presenter(s), and participants. Regardless of which platform is chosen, an understanding of the capabilities of the platform is essential.
- Determine whether you have appropriate human resources available to carry out the webinar effectively.
  - Designate a point person to lead the webinar team.
  - You will need a webinar host and a technical support person in addition to the presenter(s).
  - This setup will allow presenters to focus on their presentations and not worry about "behind-the-scenes" activities. Depending on the expected number of participants and the communication options available (e.g., chat, Q&A, polls), you may need additional team members to monitor/manage those options.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

- Try to create a relaxed, comfortable, professional environment before, during and after the live broadcast for your presenters and your audience.
- Presenter effectiveness is a critical aspect of a successful webinar, so be strategic when recruiting talent. Recruit presenters who are
  - Experts in their fields
  - Have good camera presence
  - Willing to commit preparation and practice time beyond that normally required for a face-to-face session
  - Clearly state the learning objective(s) and the purpose of the webinar, to help guide the presenters in developing their content.
  - If you have multiple speakers with similar areas of expertise, assigning roles or content matter for each of the presenters can help reduce duplication of content. Some overlap may be necessary or unavoidable for the flow of the topic(s) to develop a clear, concise, expression of the subject matter.
- Encourage presenters to incorporate engagement with the audience into their presentations. Engagement with participants before, during, and after a webinar is key for a positive participant experience. It is important that presenters incorporate participant engagement opportunities *throughout* the webinar. Example engagement options include
  - Handouts
  - An activity
  - Polling questions
  - Feedback in the Q&A or chat box
  - Video clips
  - Animated dialogue between presenters
- Conduct at least one pre-webinar practice session. Practice allows presenters and other members of the webinar team to experience what the live webinar will be like and how the hardware and software will function. Additionally, practice sessions provide opportunities to work out any rough edges of a presentation.
- Ensure that participants are aware of the date and time of the webinar, and pre-enroll participants when possible.
  - Pre-enrollment is an excellent time and tool to gather specific demographic data needed, by building a questionnaire into the registration process for the webinar.

- Pre-enrollment can also help you prepare for the webinar, by giving you a heads up on the number of people interested in attending.
- The webinar platform administrator can use this preliminary data to verify if the capacity of the webinar platform will be able to meet the possible demand for the live broadcast.
- Marketing a webinar is much like marketing a face-to-face session. Word of mouth, social media, email, e-newsletters, fliers, and website posts are all effective tools for marketing webinars. Many webinar platforms allow participants to enroll for the webinar ahead of time. Once enrolled, these individuals can be sent automatic email reminders to ensure that they remember the day and time of the webinar.